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12 FREDDY AT 40

Four decades after the release of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, the man behind the maniac, Robert Englund, shares thoughts on the character that made him famous, the evolution of Freddy, his favourite unmade *Elm Street* sequel, and returning to the role one final time.

PLUS! The beloved first lady of *Elm Street*, Heather Langenkamp reflects on a lifetime of battling Freddy Krueger.

by Ernie Magnotta and Andrea Subissati

10mstrous lessives

Even in a genre that prides itself in breaking taboos, sex with monsters is still relatively unexplored. Researcher Ella Gallego hopes to change that with her new eye-opening study on erotic horror. **PLUS!** Gallego's favourite monstrous sex scenes!

by SEAN PLUMMER

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Magic: The Gathering has been delighting players and collectors with an ever-growing gallery of terrifying ghouls and goblins for over three decades. Now, Rue Morgue looks at the tabletop RPG's horror hall of fame. by KEVIN HOOVER

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Barely out of her teens, the Australian filmmaker behind *So Vam* and *T Blockers* returns to wreck the halls with *Carnage for Christmas*. by ROCCO T. THOMPSON

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DEBATE: What is the best *Nightmare on Elm Street* sequel?



hose among us who can remember seeing *A Nightmare on Elm Street* in the cinema during its first theatrical run might feel a little pang of something in the old bones to hear that the film turned 40 this year. For me, an elder millennial who rarely sees horror movies in the theatre, much less during their initial run of engagement, I feel like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* has always existed. I'm older than the film, so it was there when I came of age to peruse the VHS racks at the video store; it was there at the sleepovers I attended (although I was usually the only one paying attention to it), and as I continued with my horror fandom, scholarship, and career, it was always there. It occurs to me now, with a new opportunity to contemplate it thanks to this new interview material with its stars, that this was a film that set an important standard for me in terms of what horror could and should offer its audience.

That's not to say it's my *favourite* movie of all time — in fact, I'm just now realizing that on those miserable occasions whereupon I'm charged with that question, I tend to rattle off a vague top-three that changes from week to week but rarely includes the original *NOES*. But there's no denying that it's an objectively great film in terms of all the factors that really matter to the average horror fan: a scary concept, a solid script, a competent cast, and don't even get me started on the practical effects. From standpoints both technical and artistic, I really can't find fault with it. And what's more, here I sit in 2024, reading new interviews with Heather Langenkamp and Robert Englund — both of whom I've met in person numerous times — and they're still revealing aspects of that film I'd never considered before. That stuff about each of the Elm Street teens being distracted by a particular slice of their era? Knock me over with a razor-tipped feather!

But really, even with all these new nuggets to discover, *Nightmare*'s greatness, to me, comes down to the brass tacks: it's a coming-of-age film where a generation of teens not only realize that they're on their own in their peril, but their parents, far from being able to help them out with it, are in fact responsible for it. It's an axiom that has only continued to become more relevant as modernity hurtles on at a breakneck pace – generational gaps have gotten shorter to accommodate the fact that we have less in common with those five years younger than us than we do with those ten years older. But one thing that always seems to carry over is that sense of disillusionment with the ideologies of the generation that came before, whether it be for destroying the environment or the economy, normalizing the racism and sexism that's so damn hard to dismantle, or heck, taking up pitchforks to hunt down and immolate the suspected school pedophile without due process, like so many medieval mobs.

Far be it from me to defend the human rights of a bona fide monster, mind you. Whether guilty or innocent of the kiddie diddling, I'd be hard pressed to send my own son (okay, he's a Pomeranian) to an obedience school mopped by the bastard son of a hundred maniacs. But just as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* provokes us to consider whether and how monsters are made, it does the same for heroes. Carol J. Clover's *Men, Women and Chain Saws* is oft cited as the last word on the final girl, but I've never been all that inspired by these female heroines with the *audacity* (note the *sarcacity*) to mix misogynist purity narratives with phallic items in order to resonate with an assumedly male audience (that's one hell of a reductive paraphrasing there, and I look forward to the hate mail for it). Nancy Thompson doesn't strap on a metaphorical dildo *or* a chastity belt to get the job done because Wes Craven was fucking smarter than such base bromides, and he understood that we are, too.

So here's to you, Wes, and the film I consider your magnum opus – may it continue to provoke thought as well as nightmares for another 40 years!

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RUE MORGUE #221 is dedicated to the memory of Bennie Pecota R.I.P.

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Cover: *A Nightmare on Elm Street*Design by Shane Mills

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I JUST STARTED digging into my September/October issue beginning with (as I usually do) your letter from the editor. Bit rough on the social sciences, don't you think? I came across my first issue of *Rue Morgue* in a now defunct media chain in New Orleans while pursuing a grad degree in psychology, which has served me well for decades, if not opening the doors to untold riches... I'd like to think that studying sociology gave you a unique perspective on the great work that you have done since then. Love *Rue Morgue* and love what you have done with it over the years.

TYLER HUDSON, M.A. – ORANGE PARK, FLORIDA

I CAN ALWAYS count on *Rue Morgue* to shine a light on the dark corners of the genre I love. I am specifically referring to your article on the Morbidly Curious Book Club from your most recent issue [*RM#220*]. Most people think horror is all about the Jasons and the Freddys but that article really showed how they are just the tip of the iceberg to a very broad and multilayered subject. I've got the issue bookmarked for when family comes over!

LILIANA GOMEZ, VIA EMAIL

I HAD NO IDEA there was a court case involving the original *Nosferatu* [that resulted in] a judgement to burn all copies of the film. Thank the gods of cinema that didn't happen as we would have lost one of the great film treasures of all time. And thanks for tracking down Mr. Stoker's estate and getting to the bottom of the story; both my wife and I found it very interesting and are even more excited to see the remake now.

D. OLIVER, VIA EMAIL

I RECENTLY PICKED UP up the latest issue of *Rue Morgue* [RM#219] and then jumped right into the world of horror! I had seen trailers for *Longlegs* and *Cuckoo*, but it was only after reading "Son of Psycho" and "Call of Cuckoo" that I truly became interested in seeing both these films. Each article gave a great analysis (without spoilers) and gave behind-the-scenes insights from the writer/director. Both were well-written and showcased the human side of making a horror movie. After reading this issue, it seems to me like I'll be visiting the *Rue Morgue* again soon.

EDDIE KUNZ – PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

COOL ARTICLE ABOUT RAT MOVIES [Bowen's Basement, RM#219]. I remember being teased like crazy when Willard came out because I had a similar name. Hopefully, Bowen can help a friend of mine and I out with a killer rodent flick. It was back in the early days of the show Entertainment Tonight. They were doing an interview with an actress as she was filming a movie in which they showed her in the mouth of a giant rat and being flung around. I was wondering if Bowen had seen that episode. If he did, does he remember the actress and the movie she was filming with the giant rat?

WILLIE HOLMES – CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

I'VE BEEN READING Rue Morgue since the beginning, but I don't think I've ever seen the band Monster A Go-Go mentioned? That band is fucking rad! You should cover them.

RAY BERRY, VIA EMAIL



AWESOME REVIEW review of *Teleportasm* in *Rue Morgue* [*RM#220*]. Thank you.

JOSHUA MILLICAN, VIA INSTAGRAM

RE: *THE SUBSTANCE* on *Rue Morgue TV* – This movie accosted me. It was fucking brutal, con-



jured images from Kubrick and Lynch, and was simultaneously a movie all its own. It's so bleak and sad and I just wanted it to be over. It reminds me of the mother/daughter paradigm as well. It was beautiful. It's truly the pinnacle of horror as a woman. Coralie really knows what she's doing with *Revenge* and then this. Bravo! I'll never ever watch it again, but please, please, watch it if you haven't. And then go pet some puppies and don't look in the mirror.

SAM ROMERSA, VIA YOUTUBE

RE: SYMPATHY FOR THE SEQUEL on Rue Morgue TV— Sorry, folks, I just can never get to your enjoyment of Alien 3. The writer disrespected the profoundly beautiful new family bond that resulted from the ending of Aliens. It was too much. I become physically affected from the anger each time that movie opens, and I simply cannot watch the rest of this dreary movie, although I admit, for what it is, Fincher did well, Assembly Cut or not.

@NEWAGEGIGOLO, VIA YOUTUBE

RE: TERROR TAROT ON *RUE MORGUE TV* — Great job, Laura, as usual. I so enjoy your interpretations of tarot in film!

ROBIN MATHON, VIA YOUTUBE

RE: FACE OF HORROR CONTEST — I want to win this contest! And wanted to tell you how awesome it is to be a part of it! I would have never found your magazine! My little guy River is twelve and loves *Creepshow*! Not only will you and your team bring us closer, hopefully my little guy will be spooky for life! Thank you!

SIMONE CRAMER THORNE, VIA EMAIL

I JUST SUBSCRIBED to a digital edition and getting into the Halloween issue. I am a first time subscriber and decided to go digital vs hard copy. Thank you so much for all you and the team do. Love the magazine.

CHRIS LANGE, VIA FACEBOOK





CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

1SSUE # 221

The twelfth US president, Zachary Taylor, died in 1850 of cholera morbus, caused by consuming tainted cherries and ice milk.

For contributing the opening narration for 1974's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, actor John Larroquette was paid in marijuana.

In 1818, Abraham Thornton, on trial for murder, requested "trial by combat," an over-looked practice that had never been abolished by British Parliament. He was acquitted when his accuser declined to fight.

TV spots for 2004's *Seed of Chucky* included a disclaimer that singer Britney Spears did not appear in the film, because the ads showed the scene where Chucky drives a fairly convincing look-alike off a cliff.

US B-17 aerial gunner Maynard "Snuffy" Smith once saved the lives of his crewmen by putting out a fire in the fuselage – in part, by urinating on it. He later earned the Medal of Honor.

Studio executives wanted Phoebe Cates' disturbing Santa monologue removed from *Gremlins*, but Joe Dante fought tooth and nail to keep it in.

Kampanaphobia is described as the fear of bells.

When Christian Slater learned that the original choice for his role in *Interview with the Vampire* was the late River Phoenix, he donated his salary to Phoenix's favourite charity.

There are an estimated 20 quadrillion ants on Earth, outweighing birds and mammals combined.

Circa 2010, Electronic Arts was developing a video game that cast players as Jack the Ripper as he stalked around London dispatching sex workers (actually vampires in disguise). The game was cancelled before release.

During sleep, your brain gets rinsed in spinal fluid.

Ben Affleck's first directing gig was a 1993 short film called *I Killed My Lesbian Wife,* Lung Her on a Meat Hook, and Now I Have a Three-Picture Deal at Disney.

In 2017, a young girl in the UK died from a burst stomach ulcer caused by

Rapunzel Syndrome, a complication brought on by the compulsion to eat one's own hair (trichophagia).

One of the oldest known dramatic TV shows is *The Television Ghost* (1931-33), an anthology series featuring ghosts of murder victims relating their fate. It has sadly been lost.

COMPILED BY JAY CLARKE GOT A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT? SEND IT TO: INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM



ON RUE MORGUE'S

You get to set Freddy up on a blind date. Who's he having dinner with?

My ex-wives.

STEVEN T. LOMBARD, VIA FACEBOOK

Edward Scissorhands.

ROBIN RAVEN, VIA FACEBOOK

Mary Lou from Prom Night II.

@CROMSAUNDERS, VIA INSTAGRAM

Lydia Deetz, because you know she would call in reinforcements when the date goes south.

@KEVINSHAUNTEDTOYBOX, VIA INSTAGRAM

Leatherface in drag.

@BLLYDDPAETWR, VIA INSTAGRAM

Pamela Voorhees, because Freddy would tell Jason he was the man of her dreams.

TRACY L. FULTZ JR., VIA FACEBOOK

FINAL WORDS
AS CAPTIONED BY YOU ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA



"I HAD NO IDEA AMY FROM *FRIGHT NIGHT* HAD A BROTHER."

THIS MONTH'S CAPTION CONTEST WINNER IS

JOSH OBERSHAW, @BRAINPOLLUTION1, VIA X
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THE (POSSIBLE) ALIEN ABDUCTION OF TRAVIS WALTON

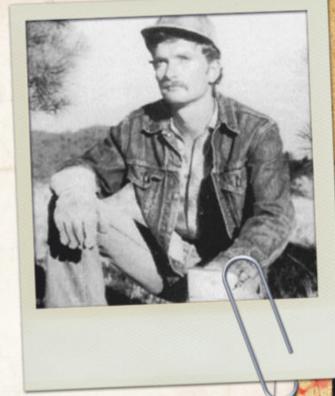
If anyone were to ask me for a synopsis of Robert Lieberman's 1993 sci-fi thriller *Fire*

in the Sky, my description would probably be about the last eleven minutes. When protagonist Travis Walton (D.B. Sweeney) recounts being abducted and experimented on by aliens, the film depicts the most harrowing alien abduction ever put to celluloid. Walton wakes up in a tomb-like alien pod, floats helplessly around a room in the ship where he plows headfirst into the half-rotted corpse of another unfortunate abductee, before undergoing a series of experiments by little green men that play out like a torturous medical procedure with just a dash of latex kink. It's a truly disturbing scene, which is no small feat considering the "true story" it was based upon was likely a scam.

On November 5, 1975, the real-life Travis Walton was reported missing in the Turkey Springs area of Arizona. His logging chief, Michael Rogers, and fellow crew members claimed that Walton left their vehicle after seeing a light hovering just off the road, only to be caught in the mysterious light before disappearing entirely. A 50-person search

party was unable to find Walton the next day, and by November 9 his mother called off the search. Walton resurfaced on November 12, calling his sister from a payphone in the nearby town of Heber. Days later, during an interview with a local radio station, Walton described his experience, claiming to have fought off three bald creatures before being dragged into another room by a human in a helmet, where another group of humans put a clear plastic sheet over his face. He claims to have no memories after that until he found himself back on land.

Walton's story quickly caught on with the media, particularly the *National Enquirer* who awarded Walton, Rogers, and company \$5000 for supplying the best UFO case of the year. But that financial reward, along with a lot of the circumstances surrounding the abduction, is where the story starts to come apart at the seams. Apparently, Walton's logging crew was in hot water with the Forestry Service as they were about to miss a deadline for work that would have meant a \$2500 fine and disqualification for all future contracts. On top of that, Walton had a record for stealing cheques, most of his friends and family weren't bothered by



his disappearance, and it just so happened that he was a UFO buff who had watched the NBC prime-time special *The UFO Incident* just two weeks prior to his vanishing. So while it is entirely possible that the above is true and that Walton was abducted by aliens, it seems more likely that his eyes were on the prize instead of the skies.

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

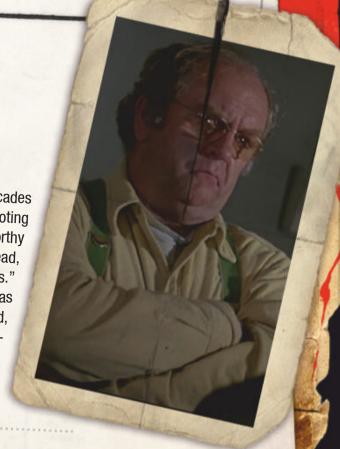
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ...

Wilfred Brimley, "Blair" from The Thing (1982)

Cast for his everyman appearance by director John Carpenter, Wilfred Brimley had true blue-collar credentials. A teen dropout, he worked as a cowboy before spending three years in the U.S. Marine Corps, followed by stints as a bodyguard and horseshoer before trying his hand as a bit-part actor and stuntman. Brimley followed *The Thing* with a key role in *Tender Mercies* (1983), and in 1985 starred in Ron Howard's *Cocoon*. The latter role was a commercial and critical success and gave rise to the "Brimley line" internet meme,

due to the actor playing around two decades his senior. Oddly enough, his work promoting diabetes awareness was also deemed worthy of meme-ification, resulting in a widespread, tongue-in-cheek pronunciation of "Diabeetus." From the late '80s, Brimley graced screens as the genial face of the Quaker Oatmeal brand, ironically demonstrating the same down-to-earth appeal that Carpenter had sought for his homicidal alien doppelgänger.

LOUIS FLETCHER



9 ROM

NEEDFUL THINGS

STIFF'S FUNERAL FLASK \$24.99 USD

You know what we hate about funerals? The lack of a well-stocked bar. Now you can bring your spirits wherever you go with Uncle Mordecai Stiff's stainless-steel flask. Measuring 5.5-inches tall and featuring your friendly neighbourhood mortician, it's equipped to hold 8 oz. of horror hooch, spooky sauce, or your favourite embalming fluid.

Shopmortem.com

ZOMBIE MANGA COLORING BOOK \$14.99 USD

Colouring ain't just for kids! With more than 60 gruesome scenes of brain-munchers splattered across high-quality paper to prevent bleed-through, this book is designed to be torn up and enjoyed like so much rotting flesh. And for those who might be intimidated at the prospect of measuring up to the likes of Tom Savini, practice pages offer tips and tricks to making your viscera more vivid.

Quarto.com

BLIZZ WEB BOOTS \$120 USD

Whether you're chasing your undead creature through the glaciers of the Arctic or holed up with your crew at Outpost 31, frostbitten toes are nothing to fear with these insulated "Winterween" moon boots. Made with rubber, patent leather, and vegan fur upper, they're completely cruelty-free — although we can't necessarily say the same for the wearer.

Strangecvlt.com

WEREWOLF HALLOWEEN WESTERN SHIRT \$46.40 USD

It won't take a full moon to watch the fur fly when you're decked out in these western-style werewolf button-downs. Cut in a classic fit for extra room for larger lycanthropes, they're available in three breeds... um, colours... so you can match your pack. Boozelele.com

GOOSEBUMPS SPLATTER WRAPPING PAPER \$11.99 USD

Behold, a gift from HorrorLand! Printed on a single 30 X 96-inch roll and festooned with images from the wildly popular kid horror sensation, this officially licensed wrapping paper from Trick or Treat Studios will lend your gifts a little extra cred with the millennial readers on your list.

Trickortreatstudios.com



HANDMADE

CANDY'S BOOK THONGS

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185-MI

Is there anything better than curling up on a cold and snowy night with a hot drink, a warm blanket, and a good, scary novel? How about a scary novel adorned with an equally horrific bookmark? Granted, the artisan world is replete with spooky page holders in a variety of formats, often involving a decorative cord or ribbon to mark the pages with charms, beads, and

pendants that hold it in place.

But Texas-based Candy Mosley has been creating charming bookmarks for twenty attempt the de years, and stands my body as

out from the crowd by using a decidedly unique term.

first attempt brow "I began using the term book thong as a silly little name, because they fit in the crack of the book," she tells Rue Morgue. "I have gotten a few messages from gift recipients who are properly out-

Pearl-clutchers aside, Mosley has built a loyal following over the years by tailoring her creations to match various horror subgenres and themes: a black velvet ribbon with a skull and plague doctor charm, witchy pendants with Halloweeny orange and black beading, a blood-spat-

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feet square,

tered guillotine, and a Krampus-inspired ornament with

a snowflake and a bell, which would perfectly complement a cozy night under the tree te, however, with Brom's Kram-

pus: The Yule Lord. "I found the tiniest little ceramic gargoyle and bat beads from South America, and I fell in love," says Mosley. "The black raven is my best horror-themed seller

right now. He comes with his own trinket – an offering to the reader!" Mosley's shop features no shortage of unique

designs, and the artist draws inspiration from her own horror bookshelf (she cites Adam Nevill, Nick Roberts, Ambrose Ibsen, Ania Ahlborn, Graham Masterton, Lee Mountford, and Tananarive Due as some modern faves) as

well as rare or unusual glass beads and ornaments that hit the right note between spooky dreariness and timeless elegance.

"I see a particular bead and get the itch to create around it," she says. "I also love using antique copper and bronze supplies that provide a vintage, not quite perfect feel - like something that has been laying around an abandoned house for decades."

Find Candy on Etsy: etsy.com/ shop/CandysBookThongs.

JENN ADAMS



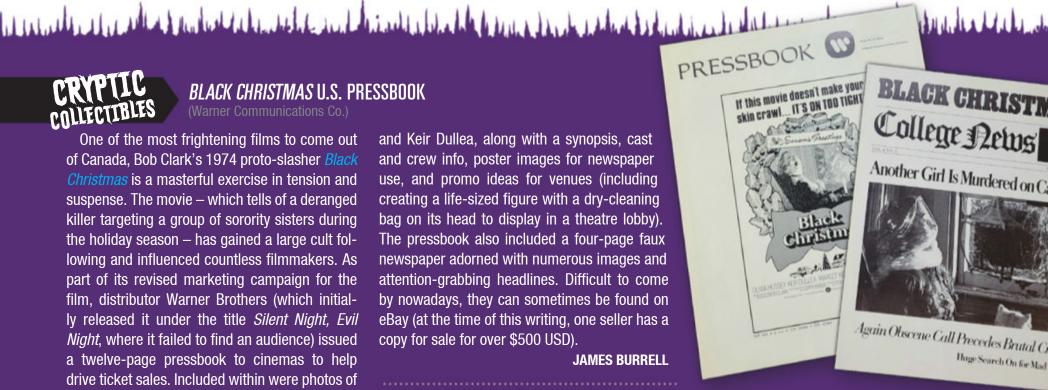
BLACK CHRISTMAS U.S. PRESSBOOK

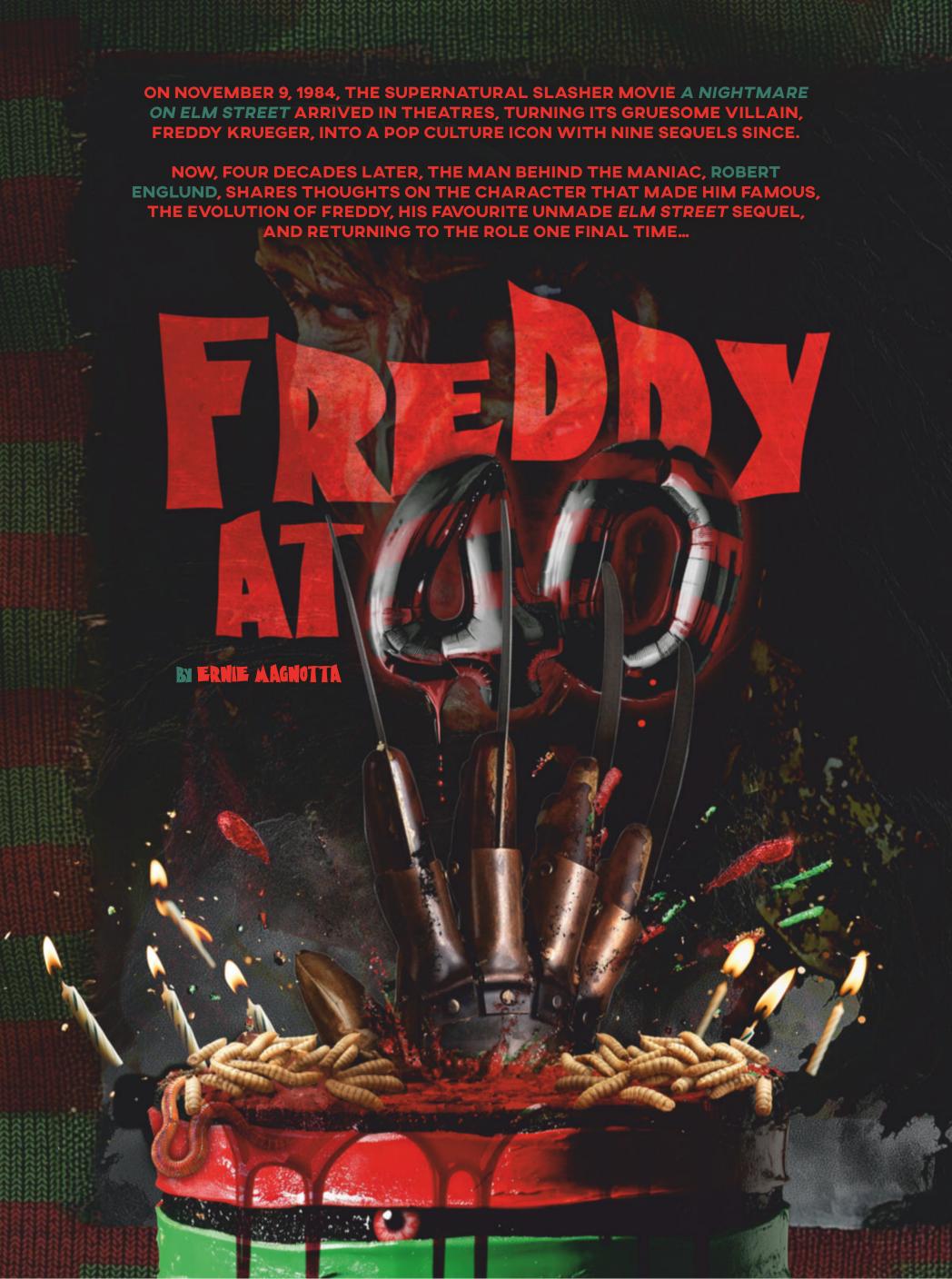
One of the most frightening films to come out of Canada, Bob Clark's 1974 proto-slasher Black Christmas is a masterful exercise in tension and suspense. The movie – which tells of a deranged killer targeting a group of sorority sisters during the holiday season - has gained a large cult following and influenced countless filmmakers. As part of its revised marketing campaign for the film, distributor Warner Brothers (which initially released it under the title Silent Night, Evil Night, where it failed to find an audience) issued a twelve-page pressbook to cinemas to help drive ticket sales. Included within were photos of stars Olivia Hussey, Margot Kidder, John Saxon,

and Keir Dullea, along with a synopsis, cast and crew info, poster images for newspaper use, and promo ideas for venues (including creating a life-sized figure with a dry-cleaning bag on its head to display in a theatre lobby). The pressbook also included a four-page faux newspaper adorned with numerous images and attention-grabbing headlines. Difficult to come by nowadays, they can sometimes be found on eBay (at the time of this writing, one seller has a copy for sale for over \$500 USD).

JAMES BURRELL

MORE CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES AT RUE-MORGUE.COM







Elm Street Memories: (clockwise from bottom right) Robert Englund, Heather Langenkamp, Jsu Garcia, Amanda Wyss, and Johnny Depp.

orty years ago, in the immortal 1984 classic *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Wes Craven unleashed child murderer turned terrifying supernatural dream demon Freddy Krueger on an unsuspecting world. Since then, the hat-wearing, razor-gloved, burnt-faced boogeyman in a red-and-green sweater not only became a horror icon, but also a pop culture phenomenon who appeared in a total of nine films (where, in all but one, he is played by the amazing Robert Englund) as well as a two-season television series titled *Freddy's Nightmares*.

A horrifying monster who can kill you in your dreams struck a chord with audiences and the original film not only became an enormous hit, made Wes Craven and Robert Englund household names, and created the aforementioned beloved franchise, but it also started a merchandising frenzy that saw countless pieces of Freddy memorabilia released, including masks, gloves, model kits, action figures, video games, novels, and comic books... just to name a few.

For those of us who grew up alongside the kids of Elm Street, Freddy haunted our nightmares as much as our VHS collections. Now, *Rue Morgue* celebrates the film that changed the genre forever with the actor whose intensity and physicality made his character an indelible icon of the consumer age. As genial and quippy as his murderous, molten-faced counterpart, Robert Englund looks back on the fame, the franchise, and the monster we know as Freddy.

Back in the 1980s, I remember reading about how, during your audition for the original Nightmare film, you freaked out Wes Craven because you were so intense and convincing. Was there ever anything you planned on doing with Freddy that you either abandoned or

that didn't make it into the film?

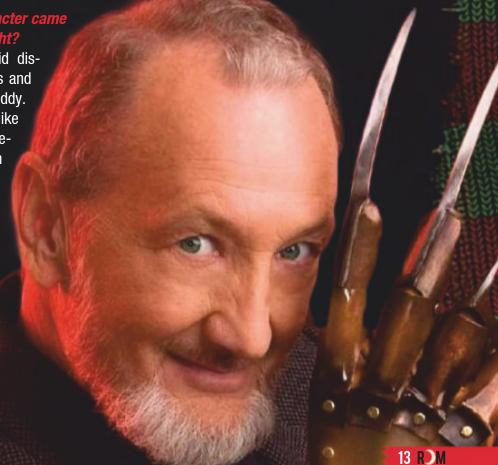
I'm trying to remember. I think, at one time, I was so in love with the bald look of Freddy that I really wanted to get rid of the hat. But then I realized how the hat could also be used to reveal the grotesque nature of Freddy's burn deformity. The fedora also had this great ability to shadow his eyes; with just a slight tilt of the chin, I [could] let the theatrical lighting in. I knew that would be an advantage too, so I eventually discarded the idea of getting rid of the hat and I wound up loving it. And when I was doing a wardrobe test, I remember seeing my shadow with the hat and also with the glove and it just looked great, so I decided that the hat was a real value and I was gonna wear it as much as possible. I would selectively reveal Freddy's baldness.

a kind of listening head tilt, almost like animals do. But I didn't get it from animals, I actually got it from the late, great Andrew Prine. I had worked with Andrew on the television series *V* and I also did a TV movie with him called *Mind Over Murder* where he played a telepathic serial killer.

Is that the one he shaved his head for?

Yes! Deborah Raffin and Bruce Davison were in it too. But I remember watching Andrew work and he did this great head tilt thing. To be honest and to be fair to Andrew and his talent, I think I borrowed that. Andrew was a wonderful actor. I remember seeing him in the original Broadway production of *The Miracle Worker* with Patty Duke and he was phenomenal. Such a talent.

Yeah, it was a very rapid discovery sequence that Wes and I went through with Freddy. We talked about very catlike movements, and I had recently seen Nosferatu with Klaus Kinski, so that sort of influenced the posture a bit. Then there were other things I discovered. For instance, with the weight of the glove, there became a kind of gunslinger pose and I combined that with the thrust of the neck that Kinski did as Nosferatu. I also did



"A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET IS THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE IN AMERICA."

- ROBERT ENGLUND

John Carpenter has said that Michael Myers is a metaphor for whatever evil in the world frightens you: you can project your fears onto that white mask. We all know that Freddy became a supernatural dream killer who targeted children, but I always wanted to know what the character represents to you.

Wes Craven had the best line and it always made perfect sense to me. He used to call Freddy the bastard father of us all, but he's also symbolic of the loss of innocence in culture. Young kids are happy-go-lucky and then they encounter Freddy and they start learning the sins of their elders. Freddy is kind of emblematic of that. It's like those David Lynch movies where the camera goes down into the manicured, beautiful green lawn and underneath it you see all the maggots and the worms and everything. Freddy's sort of that loss of innocence and you begin to see what's really going on. And Elm Street is the all-American street, like Oak Street or Main Street, but it's also the street where John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Wes is very smart. Part of that is symbolism of the loss of innocence for America. After the death of Kennedy, morality changed, kids started drinking more in high school and smoking more marijuana, and divorce escalated. 1963 was a real moment in time. It was the beginning of a loss of innocence. And we're still feeling the repercussions of all that after the assassinations of JFK, Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy, and also the Vietnam War. Things are crazy now, but it was worse back then. So, Wes is sort of expressing that with Freddy and Elm Street. A Nightmare on Elm Street is also the loss of innocence in America.

That makes sense. And I always felt that Car penter set Halloween's past event in 1963 to similar reasons.

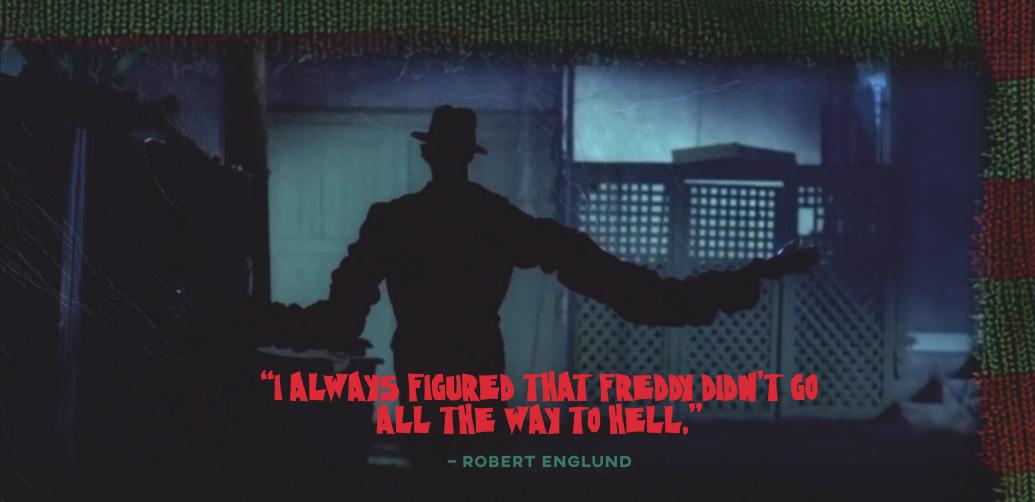
Yeah, I think you're right. And also, with both of them, there's that nihilism. But, like Jamie Lee Curtis is a final girl, a survivor, and so is Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*, Wes always wanted there to be a *Beauty and the Beast* thing going on in *Nightmare* and he wanted Heather Langenkamp's Nancy to win and defeat Freddy because, just like in the other films, he wanted to leave the viewers with hope.



Man Behind The Monster: Englund's role in the original **Nightmare on Elm Street** and seven of its sequels has made him an icon of the genre.

You know, when I think back on the Elm Street series, I vividly remember that, around 1988 when Dream Master was released, the Freddy character was really at its height in popularity. I mean, he was everywhere. What was that time like for you?

Well, I've done close to a hundred movies now and lots and lots of television, but for me, I was kind of exhausted by '88 because I had done the first season of *Freddy's Nightmares* and Nightmare 4 back-to-back. Plus, I was offered a chance to direct with 976-Evil, so I was trying to sustain that forward motion. I was also dealing with doing MTV and talk shows and all of that, so I was learning that game, and it's nothing they teach you in school. They don't teach you about doing movies in Europe or about how to do a press junket. I remember doing a bunch of interviews in New York and I saw a rack of clothes go by. Sharon Stone came out of the hotel room next to mine and she said, "You have to change for every interview." And she was right, because if they put you on the news at noon and then you go on the ten o'clock news and you're wearing the same thing, it looks like you only have one jacket! If you did the New York press junket, you had to do all the morning shows at the time like Regis, The Today Show and Good Morning America, and then at night you do all the talk shows. So, I was learning that and learning how to be fresh, because you get asked the same questions a lot. You have to have the same answers, but come up with a joke or a quip so it seems fresh. Otherwise, you start sounding like a robot. So I was still mastering that, but I was also starting to go to film festivals overseas and I realized I was international. Very soon after that, I started working overseas. That's the big gift; the big happy accident to a career that no one tells you about. I had the television series V and the Nightmare on Elm Street franchise back-toback, and they were both huge international hits. I mean, number one in Tokyo and number one in Berlin. Culturally, you can't get much further apart than that. So, it was great.



I love the original Nightmare on Elm Street, but I also love the sequels even though Freddy changed quite a bit and became funnier. I always wondered what your thoughts were about how the character evolved.

Well, when it comes to the organic nature of Freddy doing more comedy, I mean, Freddy was always cracking one-liners, right? For example, in the first movie we have Freddy saying, "I'm your boyfriend now, Nancy," and sticking his tongue out of a phone, and tearing off Tina's face and mocking her; he was always joking around. But you're right. It did change. We probably jumped the shark around *Nightmare 6*, but I have to be honest, we intended to. We were sort of making that movie about the cultural references and putting Freddy in there with the cultural touchstones. We were kind of having our cake and eating it too. I remember doing

one shot in that movie where I was pushing a wagon full of spikes and, literally, the mental image was Bugs Bunny. But that was just following the natural organic nature that Wes had originally set up with Freddy as a cruel clown, and I think it was Wes who told me that Freddy was like a cat playing with a mouse before he kills it, so I always held that image in my mind's eye. He toys with his victims. And Freddy is un-

abashedly happy in

his work. He's on a

real sweet revenge

mission. I always figured that Freddy didn't go all the way to Hell. He got down to purgatory and he's sort of in this waiting room for Hell, but every time anybody from Elm Street that has anything to do with burning him alive talks about him or dreams about him or remembers him, he has this chute into their subconscious, and then he can haunt them and toy with them and torment them. Freddy loves that. That's his idea of a good time. There's a certain joy he takes in his haunting.

There were plenty of sequel scripts that never got made. Was there one you really love?

Well, I wrote one for *Nightmare 3* which was about the older sister of Tina, who was played by Amanda Wyss in the original film. Tina's sister comes back to Elm Street to solve the crimes and she's gonna be the new female warrior. She's older and I had her in glasses and a turtleneck with a pencil in her hair. She would find all the backstory on microfiche and use that as her entry into figuring out a way to stop Freddy. I got the idea from watching Brian De Palma's *Sisters*.

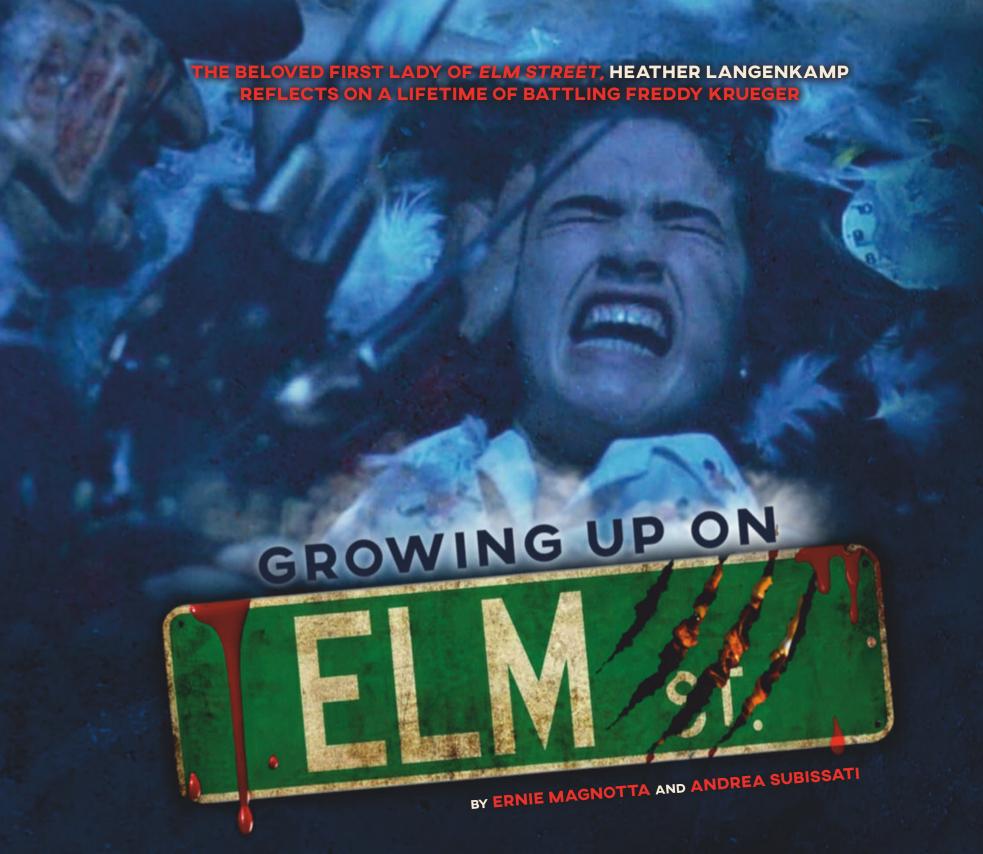
Never got made, though. But a couple of my ideas from that script showed up in other projects. One of them showed up in *Freddy's Nightmares* and one or two things showed up in other movies, but I'll tell you a great story. A couple of years ago, Heather Langen-

kamp did a big charity event at the old Whiskey a Go Go rock bar on Sunset Boulevard. It was the cast of *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* reading the script – but it wasn't the shooting script. Heather got the original draft, which I had never read. I only read the final draft that we went with when we shot it. It was amazing. And I wish I'd volunteered to read the stage directions because the writing between the dialogue – setting up a scene or describing a sequence – was as good as any Stephen King short story. It was really great. If you're ever at a convention and anybody's selling scripts, keep your eye out for a first draft of *Dream Warriors*. It's a really good read. So I think my favourite unmade script was

Tell me a little bit about the work you've been doing lately.

the first draft of Elm Street 3.

I'm playing old doctors and old priests and old scientists. I'm doing a lot of parts like that now. Those parts fit me like a glove - no pun intended. But unless I get a project that I really like, like Stranger Things or something, I'm basically just doing voice-over work now. I mean, I'm not hanging up my hat. Oops, I just did it again! But I'm not seeking out roles like I used to. This year, because it's the 40th anniversary, I had to keep my schedule free because I'm doing a half dozen big Comic Cons and film festivals. Those contracts are in concrete, so I wouldn't be able to just cancel in order to do a guest spot on Law & Order. This year, I had to turn down a movie in Barcelona, a movie in Rome, and I just had to turn down another film overseas. And you know me, I love working over there. But I will definitely be back doing something because, obviously, people want to work with me. I used to be able to fly in for a day and do something and then get back on a plane and go somewhere else and



n 1984, the roots of the archetypal "final girl" had been laid down by such films as The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974), Halloween (1978), and Friday the 13th (1980), but as the figure became more readily understood by its audiences, one final girl stood out among the rest - a teen scream queen who's tough but vulnerable, good but not inaccessibly "pure," a loyal friend, a devoted girlfriend, and a true heroine with the courage to face one of horror's vilest villains three times over. That crown belongs to Nancy Thompson, a role indelibly tied to actress Heather Langenkamp who not only portrayed her twice, but also played herself inhabiting that lifetime role in a groundbreaking meta installment that paved the way for *Scream*.

As is usually the case with this sort of thing, Langenkamp had no idea she was about to make history when she auditioned for the role of Nancy Thompson at the tender age of twenty. Having landed a lead role in the indie drama *Nickel Mountain*, she was tipped off about *Elm Street* auditions by casting director Annette Benson, who had brought her in to read for *Night of the*

Comet that same year (that role eventually went to Catherine Mary Stewart).

"It was very mundane," Langenkamp recalls of the audition process. "It was in Hollywood in a pretty terrible part of town. I got in there and I was only given four or five script pages, so I didn't have any idea that it was a horror movie. But the part was very much like me as a teenager, so I decided to just play it like myself. It was the scene at the slumber party where we're all gathered at Tina's house to be with her since she's so scared of her dreams, and Johnny has to lie to his mom. A cute little scene. So, I read it and then I went to the casting office. I got up to the second floor of this little, dingy building and there was nothing in the room except for a receptionist sitting at a flimsy card table. A few seconds later, she brought me in, and I did my

That cute little audition may not have fully prepared Langenkamp for what would become a lifelong role as a scream queen, but it did introduce her to some of the young talent that would wind up being her co-stars and the visionary

filmmaker who would change her life forever.

"They were bringing [actors] in two by two to see how they worked together," she says. "I got paired with Amanda Wyss [who played Tina], and when we went in, Wes Craven was sitting there, wearing a tie. I thought this was some preppy guy who was directing the movie! I still didn't know that it was a horror film. But Amanda and I had a really great scene together. What was kind of magical about it was that Amanda and I had never met before, but we both got the parts right there."

Langenkamp accepted the role but then, upon receiving the full script which featured teenagers getting sliced and diced by a claw-handed maniac, she (or more specifically, her management) became understandably alarmed.

"I was told by my agents that Wes Craven had just made these horrible films like *Last House on the Left* and all these other horror movies," she recalls with a laugh. "I was basically told that once you're in this type of film, you'll never work again. But then, as talent like Ronee Blakley and John Saxon got involved [with the film], I think

they changed their mind. So, I made the movie in June and July of 1984, and I didn't know what was gonna happen. I didn't really think it was gonna be a blockbuster or anything like that, but I had seen the dailies every day and it looked beautiful."

The film was a massive success, thanks in part to her portrayal of a girl-next-door type who's not afraid to break the rules now and then – the perfect symbol of the latchkey kid generation whose resourcefulness was largely earned through apathetic parenting. For Langenkamp, Nancy was an opportunity to showcase her own best qualities, which her director was open to.

"I gave her a lot more of myself; especially things like determination," she says. "I made her very focused toward the end game. I think that's one of the reasons I love Nancy so much. She was just so focused and never distracted. And Wes even said in an interview I did with him – he said that everyone else uses something to distract them from the reality in their lives. Glen is always eating or watching TV, then you have Rod who's distracted by his own sexual desires, and Tina who needs to be loved. Everyone but Nancy has something that distracts them from the problem at hand. Nancy is immediately aware that you have to focus on this problem they're all facing otherwise it's going to kill you. The way she tries to stay awake is the best representation of that. And it's a perfect metaphor. We need to stay awake in our own lives to know what's in front of us that needs to be conquered."

The other half of the film's success, of course, was in Robert Englund's iconic Freddy Krueger, whose menace didn't exactly spring from the written page for the young actor.

"I never thought about it as Freddy being this character that was going to be larger than life," Langenkamp reflects. "In the script, he's not written as scary or as fearsome as Robert Englund turned out to be. In fact, if you can think of a sad, homeless, child murderer who haunts people, you'll get why my vision of him was a lot less magnificent in my imagination. Even him being burned – I didn't know it was a full body burn, I thought it was just a burn mark on his face or something. And I hadn't seen the redand-green sweater yet, so that didn't register. The hat came after they started their wardrobe tests, so the hat was never part of my imagination. And the finger knives had me imagining something so cheesy that it was bordering on comic. I thought it all was gonna come off in a much less metaphysically powerful way, but when you see the final film, Freddy has so much power. That did not come across to me when I read the script."

It did, however, come across loud and clear in her first viewing of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*; a decidedly unglamorous private affair at the Warner Brothers studio.

"They had rented out one of the screening rooms for the cast and crew to watch it — me,





A Fighting Spirit: Nancy always survived Freddy's clutches, says Langenkamp, because she was "focused and never distracted."

Amanda, and Johnny [Depp] all went together, but when we got there, there were no seats," she recalls. "So, we sat in the aisle but were told we had to leave because the fire marshal was gonna kick us out or something! I couldn't believe it, but it was such a low-key affair. Some people wound up giving up their seats, though, and we were able to sit down and watch it."

"I WOULD LOVE TO FIGHT FREDDY ONE MORE TIME."

- HEATHER LANGENKAMP

Langenkamp liked *A Nightmare on Elm Street* well enough (I remember thinking, "Wow, that's a pretty decent movie!") but was gobsmacked to learn that it made four million dollars opening weekend without much of a publicity push. And though the film was an overnight sensation, Langenkamp resumed a largely normal life soon after, returning to college and getting married. Three years later, Wes Craven reached out to tell her he was writing a new *Nightmare* film and wanted Nancy's character to return to

help a new batch of kids face off against Freddy (ANOES 3: Dream Warriors). Langenkamp enjoyed the script and agreed to appear but was deflated to discover that Craven had passed directing reins to Chuck Russell.

"I just had to get used to the idea that someone else was gonna take his words and put them on film; I think I resented it, though," she admits. "I wasn't the happy team player that I normally would've been. I just felt that there was something unfair about it. Chuck Russell did a wonderful job, it was just a different experience. Every director has a totally different way of doing their job."

Nancy Thompson may have been killed off in *Dream Warriors* but that wasn't the end of Heather Langenkamp's footprint in the *Night-mare* franchise, which appeared to culminate in 1991's declaratively titled *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare*. By then, she was a mom and suspected that her film career had run its course... but fate had other plans.

"[A] psychic said that something very important was going to happen to me and, that day, Wes called and told me about the project," she says, referring to *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*, the director's meta take on the franchise that sees Langenkamp playing herself and coping



"WE NEED TO STAY AWAKE IN OUR OWN LIVES TO KNOW WHAT'S IN FRONT OF US THAT NEEDS TO BE CONQUERED."

- HEATHER LANGENKAMP

with Freddy Krueger's new ability to transcend formats as well as planes of consciousness. "[Craven] had been trying for several years to come up with an idea that wasn't derivative of the other Nightmare films and he finally got it," she says. "So, he sent the script to me, and I read it, and I immediately had some reservations about it. First, because I had to play Heather Langenkamp, and also because I wasn't happy with some of the things she says about her family. If I'm playing me and I'm talking about, say, my mother, then people are going to think that this is how my mom really is. I was uncomfortable talking that way about my husband, my son, my parents, etc. But I spoke with Wes again, and I really wanted to make it work, so I said yes. I just crossed my fingers and jumped in."

Now, 40 years after her breakout role, Langenkamp can reflect fondly on the men, the movies, and the monster that defined much of her acting career. Craven passed in 2015, but no universe as indelible as the one he created can stay dead for long. In the current cinematic climate of reboots, retcons, and remakes, she remains open to the possibility of returning to the role and facing off against Freddy one final time.

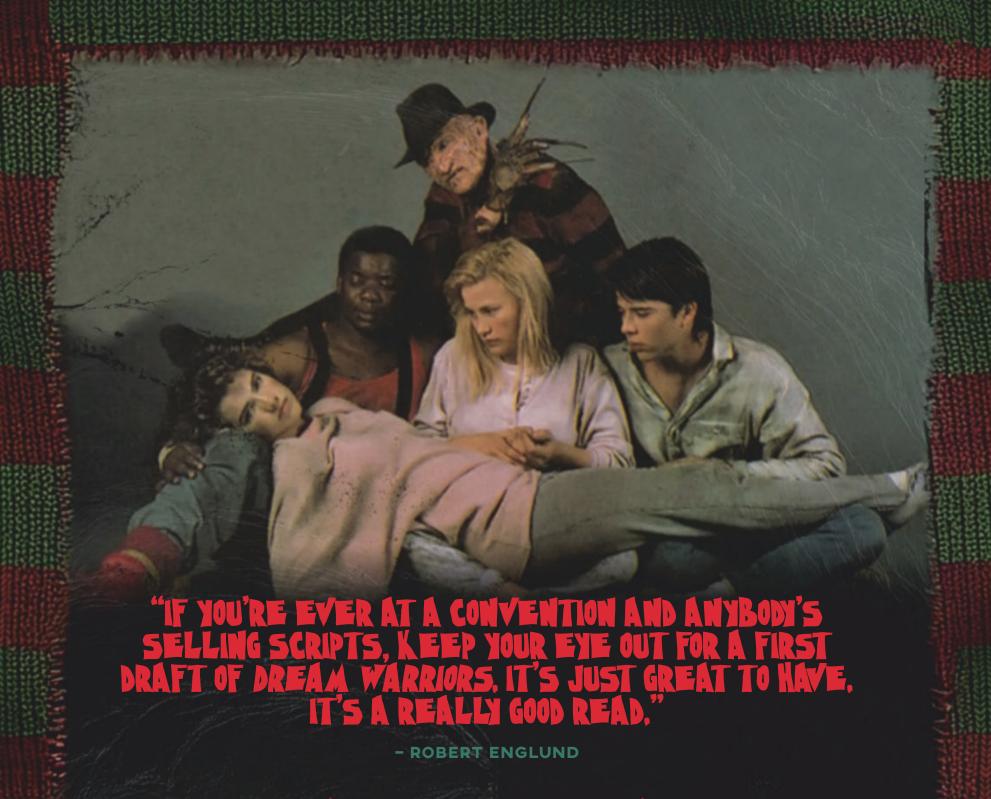
"I would love to fight Freddy one more time,"

says Langenkamp. "Even at our age, where I'm 60 and Robert is an aging Freddy, that's really interesting. It's a lifetime of battling a demon that's been after you, and I think so many people would relate to that. Nancy and Freddy are two sides of the same coin."

Langenkamp remains active in the film industry, working as a makeup coordinator with husband David LeRoy Anderson for their company AFX Studio, while still finding time for the occasional gig. Look for her in Spider One's Little Bites and Mike Flanagan's The Life of Chuck (both out in fall 2024), and Wesley Mellott's Stalked and Ryan Mc-Query's Plea (currently in post-production). But she's never strayed far from the role so near to her heart and remains proud of her legacy as Elm Street's preeminent final girl.

"When I look back at the last 40 years, I feel really good about it all," she says. "Not only the original film, but Dream Warriors and Wes Craven's New Nightmare too. There are very few opportunities in our lives to look back on and have a huge smile on your face. You look back and think, 'Wow. That was a great experience. I wouldn't have given that up for the world."





work, but I just can't do that anymore. I need more prep time.

You mentioned that you're now doctors and scientists, which re of how I've always felt that you same league as classic horror act Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, and Vircent Price. I remember thinking this in the 1980s. You co-created Freddy like, say, Karloff did with the Frankenstein Monster and Lugosi did with Dracula. And now, just like those great actors did later on in their careers, you're playing older mad scientist roles and everything.

Well, I'm an old stage actor.

I don't want to say that I have a gift, but I know

how to sing an

aria. And by

that I mean,

if I have to tell the backstory that the audience needs to hear, I know that trick. I know how to hide that exposition in my character or in the action that I'm doing whether I'm a bartender or a psychiatrist or whatever part I'm playing. The old guy who runs the fishing store by the lake and tells the kids, "Don't swim in the lake!" (laughs) I sort of know how to cloak that

stuff and hide it within a performance.
They're like these little arias of backstory
that I'm doing. And I don't mind
that because you get some
decent screen time and
they're all a little bit differ-

ent.

If the right script came along, would you consider playing Freddy one last

> I would honestly love to play Freddy again, but I'm getting old. I'm sorry to say that I don't think I've got it in me. I

don't want Freddy to be fat and slow (laughs). I mean, I'm good for one take and I can wear some Spanx and suck my gut in but the thing is, I can't do a fight scene take after take, and I can't do the [makeup] coverage. My neck's fucked, I just can't do it. But I would love to be invited back if they reboot Dream Warriors, which would be a great stand-alone film. It's a fan favourite, probably the most popular in the franchise. I'd love to do the Priscilla Pointer role; the skeptical doctor who doesn't believe in Freddy. I think that would be a great fit as a cameo and a nice wink to the fans. I mean, it's a great in-joke that I'm a doctor who doesn't believe that the kids are all having the same nightmare. There's a nice irony to that. And if there needed to be any weird dream backstory, I could spit that shit out pretty well. So, I'd like to be asked back to do that as a sort of swan song.

Thanks so much for taking the time out to chat with us, Robert. It's honestly been a thrill

My pleasure. It isn't often that you celebrate the 40th anniversary of a movie.

EVEN IN A GENRE THAT PRIDES ITSELF IN BREAKING TABOOS, SEX WITH MONSTERS IS STILL RELATIVELY UNEXPLORED. RESEARCHER ELLA GALLEGO HOPES TO CHANGE THAT WITH HER NEW EYE-**OPENING STUDY ON EROTIC HORROR** RUE MORGUE XXX • 50 cents Monstrous BY SEAN PLUMME



o monsters make you horny? If you're reading this magazine, then it's more than likely that you made the connection between sex and horror long ago. After all, the kind of fear fomented by horror movies releases adrenaline which, in turn, increases your heart rate, blood pressure, and blood flow... including to your naughty bits. This means that the physiological reaction to being afraid can be easily mistaken for – and rewritten by your brain as – sexual arousal.

Think back to your seminal scary moviegoing experiences. Maybe you were a little turned on seeing Lucy ravished by the titular vampire in beast form in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*? Did you feel a strange but exciting tingle watching Anna be taken by a tentacled creature in *Possession*? Perhaps you let out a sigh when Elisa found sexual bliss with an amphibian demigod in *The*

Shape of Water. And maybe you're a little more than curious to see Bill Skarsgård's take on the vampiric Count Orlok in director Robert Eggers' upcoming Nosferatu remake [RM #220] — a creature Skarsgård recently described as being both "gross" and "highly sexualized."

For American academic Ella Gallego, it was a 2019 viewing of Robert Eggers' film *The Lighthouse*, in which Robert Pattinson's lighthouse keeper dreams (or are they wet nightmares?) about having sex with a mermaid, that inspired her to take her scholarly interest in so-called "monster fucking" and quantify its presence in the culture at large.

"It was one of the first movies that really, really unsettled me," she says. "I think the best way to describe *The Lighthouse* is a quote that I just saw from Freud recently, which says that 'the unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later, in uglier ways."

Gallego's research on the topic of sex with monsters led her to *The Monster Theory Reader* (2020), a collection of scholarship on monsters and their larger meaning within the culture. It in turn inspired *Monstrous Desire* (monstrousdesirestudy.com), an ethnographic study in which Gallego, who has a Masters in Publishing Studies from Scotland's Stirling University, asked 2202 online respondents about their interest in monster erotica. (As of this writing, a second study is being planned to see if she can replicate the

"People want to fuck monsters for a whole slew of reasons."

- RESEARCHER ELLA GALLEGO

findings of the first, with those results to eventually be published in book form.)

Depictions of people being sexually attracted to monsters — a preference dubbed teratophilia — is nothing new, nor even limited to modern media. Take, for instance, the succubi — female-presenting demons who drain men sexually in their dreams — who appear in both Jewish and Arabic folklore dating back to the 14th century. The art in French painter and lithographer Eugène Lepoittevin's infamous Les Diables de Lithographies (1832) showcases a wide variety of taboo subjects, including humans gleefully cavorting and fornicating with demons. And the original 18th-century fairy tale of Beauty and the Beast sees the Beast imploring Beauty to not only marry him, but consummate the union.

That horny Beast, as it turns out, clearly cap-

tured the erotic imagination of many, as he reappears in Gallego's findings: he was the number one pick for "First Monster Crush" from many adaptations (including the 1987 TV show, the 1991 animated film, and the 2017 live-action movie). Actors Tim Curry (*Legend*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*) and Ron Perlman (*Hellboy*, TV's *Beauty and the Beast*) were most referenced in the "First Monster Attraction" category; and finally, zombies were deemed the least sexually desired monsters. Sorry, zombies.

"People want to fuck monsters for a whole slew of reasons," says Gallego of her findings. "For some it was about how they found the power dynamics to be really sexy. Some people found that monstrosity allowed them to enter a realm of fantasy in which they could escape social structures that they find confining. Some people said it was a fantasy where they could free themselves from the confines of humanity — which I found was really fascinating — or from their own gender, or from sexuality, or from the pressures of patriarchy."

Gallego gathered her results primarily through social media, including teratophilia Discord channels, Facebook and Instagram groups, and subreddits. Her study got a big boost when Ruby Dixon, author of the hugely popular *Ice Planet Barbarians* book series (which depicts a substantial amount of sex between human women and blue-skinned aliens), platformed Gallego's study on her Facebook group. She got over a thousand responses overnight.

Gallego says social media has allowed the monster fucking community to both find each other and group themselves according to their sexual desires and fantasies. This can mean following Patreon artists who specialize in depicting monster-human sex, joining subreddits on the topic, or curating their Tumblr timelines to only see media on the topic.

From her experience, each platform engages



with human-monster sex in "very different and interesting" ways, including by sexual orientation. Tumblr's community, for instance, is very gender queer, and engages with grotesque monstrosity the most (like wanting to have sex with the Queen Xenomorph from *Aliens*). TikTok and Instagram community members, she says,

are more likely to be women who identify as heterosexual, bisexual, or pansexual. And the r/Monster-Girl subreddit, which houses material "relating to the Monster Girl genre of hentai, mostly NSFW content," boasts over 646,000 members as of this writing, most of whom identify as male.

Like other niche online communities,

monster lovers tend to gatekeep their own, in this case via the so-called Harkness Test. Having emerged from the bowels (loins?) of Tumblr, the test takes its name from Captain Jack Harkness, a character on *Doctor Who* and its spinoff *Torch*- wood TV series. Jack's voracious sexual appetite has no discernible limits — so long as the encounter is consensual. The resulting Harkness Test basically asks users whether their monster of choice can ethically consent to having sex. Criteria include the beast being sexually mature enough for its species, of equal intelligence to

its coital counterpart, and the two (or more) participants being able to communicate in the same language. Zombies, for instance, fail the Harkness test because they lack the brain power to consent. Sorry again, zombies.

Alas, many monster admirers don't – pardon the pun – give a fuck about the gatekeepers. Says Gallego: "There are those who follow the Harkness Test on

Tumblr and those who feel like they have to inflict it on others and their desires. And that obviously causes some conflict amongst monster fuckers, especially if they're like, 'I don't give a shit about the monster. I don't give a shit about

the Harkness Test. I don't care.' The takeaway for many is 'None of this matters; it's fantasy. What are you putting restrictions on this for?' I think this is interesting, especially since consensual non-consent and rape fantasies are really popular within monster fantasies. With the Harkness Test, that's not possible."

Speaking of rape fantasies and consensual non-consent, Gallego can't yet prove it statistically, but she suspects that more women than men have fantasies of sex with monsters, primarily to indulge in desires that would not be wise to explore in the real world. (Think of the online debate that erupted this spring about whether women would be safer alone in the forest with a bear or a man — and the flood of misogyny from cisgendered men that followed.)

"For many women, fantasy is a safe avenue for them to explore taboo or more violent fantasies without harm," Gallego explains. "There's a kind of distancing that occurs when heterosexual women, or women who are attracted to

men, engage with sexual fantasies about monsters. They don't feel the pressure of patriarchy. And what I mean by that is the idea, perhaps, of fantasizing about being chased by





STILL WONDERING WHETHER MONSTER-HUMAN COITUS TURNS YOU ON? LET ACADEMIC ELLA GALLEGO WALK YOU THROUGH **SOME OF HER FAVOURITE MONSTROUS SEX SCENES!**

e Monster, **BY SEAN PLUMMER**

or what it's worth, most notorious on-screen monster sexual menace was and remains straight-up rape (we're looking at you Galaxy of Terror, The Beast Within, and Naked Lunch). But perhaps even more transgressive are those films where both human and beast enjoy bumping uglies, making these scenes more titillating than taboo. Ella Gallego comments on her top five monster fucks!

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA (1992)

Mina Murray watches best friend Lucy get ravished by Dracula in wolf-bat mode.

"It's dealing with taboo desires and repression. We're dealing with a Victorian society that is scandalized by how sexually forward Lucy is, but [Mina's] still a little bit excited by it. She very clearly has these urges but, as a woman, she's not supposed to follow through with them. And with that very famous scene where she's watching a monster ravage Lucy, she's clearly enjoying it. Monstrosity is something that is supposed to both repulse and bring people in. It's this back and forth, this contradiction, and you see that right there, reflected in that scene of that push and pull of Mina being horrified but also really aroused."

SPECIES (1995)

Alien-human hybrid Sil seduces a scientist to knock her up before killing him. "Species is a very inter-

esting depiction of predatory sex, where you're rooting for Sil. H.R. Giger came up with the Sil alien design [and] I was like, 'Oh, that totally makes sense.' Like, no wonder it's Alien but horny, because that's quite literally his cornerstone - just being so horny about aliens. And Sil is interesting because she plays on what is very clearly the monstrous feminine, especially the archetype of the monstrous mother; the creature that wants to breed. And she kills people in her wake, a bit like a black widow."

THE UNTAMED (2016)

A frustrated mother is pleasured by a tentacled alien.

"The monster can be interpreted in a number of ways; one, perhaps as an addiction - a rush of dopamine and excitement but also the crash of destruction that falls in its wake. Or, and this one I'm more inclined to believe, that sex in conservative societies is something that is kept hidden away and taboo in the dark and can often destroy us through this repression of the main characters. The monster represents pleasure without the constraints of patriarchy and its responsibilities."

THE SHAPE OF WATER (2017)

Guillermo del Toro's take on Creature from the Black Lagoon sees cleaning woman Elisa fall for - and have sex with - an amphibious god.

"The horror is not about the romantic relationship [of] the main character, Elisa, but rather the forces around them that seek to harm them - specifically the Creature. It turns the 1950s monster trope on its head by making the monster [represent] humanity itself, or at least powerful structures that seek to make monsters of the most vulnerable of our society. You know, people of colour, disabled people, women, queer men. Elisa finds a kindred spirit in the Creature."

THE LIGHTHOUSE (2019)

Robert Pattinson mounts a mermaid and Willem Dafoe gets jerked off by the Old Gods... maybe.

"I think the best way to describe The Lighthouse is a quote that I just saw from Freud recently, which says that 'the unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later, in uglier ways.' The movie, to me, really speaks to different facets of queer repression, queer desire, and being kind of chased by that desire when you are repressed." a human man through the forest would be uncomfortable for some [women] but being chased through the forest by a monster alleviates those patriarchy-derived anxieties."

Gallego's study notes that many people from the kink community have also expressed sexual attraction to monsters, as it provides a safe space for them to engage with otherwise taboo desires. The teratophiliac kinks she encountered in her research included breeding kinks (being impregnated by a monster, but not necessarily giving birth); vore (being consumed or swallowed by a large creature); and primal play (being chased or hunted by a monster, with lots of growling and snarling involved).

"Monstrosity is a fantasy... and so you can have exaggerated fantasies within it."

RESEARCHER ELLA GALLEGO

"All these things are so tied up within monstrosity," Gallego says, "because monstrosity is a fantasy, obviously, and so you can have exaggerated fantasies within it. You have creatures who spew mountains of cum because, why not? It's a fantasy. There's so much overlap there because monstrosity can be exaggerated and fit to whatever your desires are. This is definitely something I'm also planning on asking further in my second survey, because it's just too big to ignore: what is people's relationship between their specific kinks and monstrosity?"

As you may have gleaned, Gallego sees the eroticism between monsters and humans as fundamentally queer. She notes how the monsters in classic Universal movies, like 1931's Dracula and 1954's Creature from the Blac Lagoon, disrupt happy heterosexual relationships, "and there is a queerness to that." And, of course, there is also the heavily implied lesbianism of the titular vampire Countess Zaleska in cula's Daughter. In today's era, Gallego has noticed that many trans men on Tumblr love monstrosity, as it allows them to engage safely in fantasy kinks such as breeding. From her admittedly incomplete research, it appears that trans and non-binary folks have the most instances of sex with monster fantasies among gendered groups. They also have fantasies about physical transformation, with many of them seeing erotic monsters as allegories for being trans.

"Queer and trans people are often made to feel monstrous because of their identities,"





Fearsome Fantasies: Lesbian vampire sex in 1936's **Dracula's Daughter** (top), and tentacled demon sex in **Possession** (1981).

notes Gallego. "Often they are ostracized, othered, made to feel outside of the norm and so they often relate to the monster, who is a cultural creature made up of society's anxieties; something or someone who falls outside of the desirability norms of heterosexual patriarchy. They are made to feel grotesque and abnormal.

"The monster is a very political figure," she continues. "And so, when you have people who have been forcefully politicized or othered within conservative societies, be it people of colour, queer people, neurodivergent people, or trans people, they're going to find striking similarities between themselves and the monster because they have often been made monstrous by society. Obviously, there's some relation there."

Gallego admits, though, that not all monster fuckers are inspired by high-minded gender politics or philosophy.

"Of course, there are those people who don't care about anything deeper," she laughs. "They're like, 'No, I just want a monster to rearrange my guts!' A monster is going to have

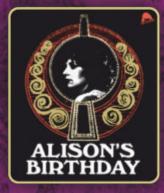
exaggerated features, so they're probably gonna have a dick the size of a baseball bat. Fair play!"

While Gallego's approach to monster fucking in *Monstrous Desire* is a scholarly one, she is quick to admit that she is a proud member of that very same community — and that you probably are too.

"I am part of it," she states. "I think that most people are part of it; they just don't want to admit it. I wouldn't consider myself the Jane Goodall of monster fuckers because that would mean that I'm not one of them! I think that once you understand how broad the attraction to erotic monsters is and how more than likely at some point in your life you have been attracted to monsters, you can get in the mud with the rest of us!"



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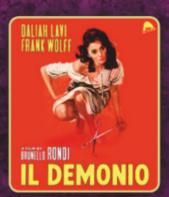
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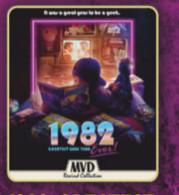
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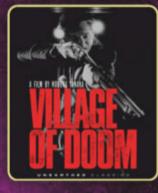
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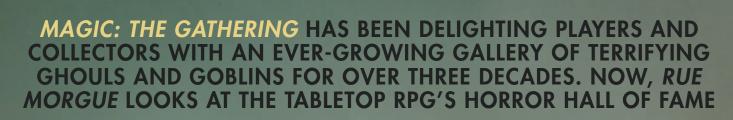
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ip open any booster pack from Magic: The Gathering and bear witness to some of the most fantastic artwork ever manifested: from mythical beasts to idyllic

landscapes, every card offers a two-inch masterpiece, specifically designed to transport players to another realm of reality where Planeswalkers battle with a curated army of creatures, artifacts, and enchantments. But despite being the first ever collectible card game with the equivalent of a PG-13 rating, MTG's multiverse is not a bloodless one: black decks, in particular, draw from swamp power and offer players the chance to command an army of the undead. Even beloved genre classics Creepshow and The Evil Dead have had their unique characters and aesthetics ported into the world of Magic, and recent expansions, like Duskmourn: House of Horror, further prove that interest in MTG's shadow side isn't waning. Fresh from splattering viscera as Senior Art Director on the newly minted Duskmourn, Wizards of the Coast's Ovidio Cartagena invites Rue Morgue readers through the cemetery gates for a peek at *Magic*'s darkest hours.

How does horror fit into MTG? Is it a niche subgenre under the broader fantasy umbrella for those who prefer black decks, or is it something more intrinsic to the game?

It's a theme we keep coming back to. There is horror in all colours of mana, as we saw in last year's *Phyrexia: All Will Be One* set. I always try to figure out different ways to put something scary, unexpected, eerie, or supernatural in. The word "horror" is broad, it encompasses so much, but it's definitely a theme you can play with in your cards, and that's how I think of it. Mechanically, it's a smaller thing than it is visually.

Are space limitations taken into consideration when designing an image, to ensure that fine details aren't compromised?

Composition is the single most important element on the card. Why? Because we need to pay attention to how shapes are distinguished. It's a complex task because there's storytelling and so on, but we make sure every card has a sense of interest.





Creature Cards: Artist John Tedrick's Scrabbling Skullcrab (top) costs one island mana to unleash, while the devastating Peer into the Abyss card by Izzy is rare and worth seven mana.

How do you go about instilling a feeling of dread through the spells, lands, enchantments, and other non-creature cards?

Enchantments create a mood. We don't have sound, we don't have movement. The way to create impending doom or any other [mood]

we want is a big reason why enchantments have an effect on the battlefield: they're our fog machine, basically. The card "Manifest Dread," designed by the great Diana Franco Campos in her debut as a MTG artist, could be a monster or it could be something good — exactly how, in a horror movie, you would see a shape at the end of the hallway. You're initially scared because it's already scary out there, but [the art] could reveal a glimmer or a friendly survivor. That really gives you a sense of dynamism.

Collectors are always on the lookout for variants (foils, borderless cards, etc.) released with each expansion. What goes into deciding what images get the "alt" treatment?

The process takes a while because that's a difficult balance. You look at the theme and the art from a collectability standpoint, then try to think of how to make it cooler. You have to know how to pick the cards — you want cards that people are going to want, and that question is part science, part art.

The recent Duskmourn: House of Horror expansion is one of the game's darkest. How often does the game embrace horror themes? Within two years in any release schedule, we're going to put something scary in there. We're probably going to have at least one faction that's horror, and by faction, I mean a subdivision of assets. It depends, too, on what other sets are around. Innistrad: Midnight Hunt and Innistrad:





Crimson Vow were close by, and both come with vampires, spirits, werewolves and other stuff, like the monstrous Gitrog frog monster. If you think about the releases we've had in the last four years, three sets are downright horror with different levels of humanity inserted in.

Slasher films of the '80s were clearly the launchpad for Duskmourn's horror aesthetic. What else inspired it?

There's definitely an influence from *giallo*. The '90s had some good stuff that I wanted to see in there; the '70s, too. Something beautiful happened in the '60s within this genre where people started prodding the monster that is horror: they were pushing the envelope artistically. That's what I wanted to do here. A lot of the references and ideas do come from the '80s slasher, but I was also influenced by literature, because I'm an avid horror reader.

One of Duskmourn's earliest reveals was also one of its most disturbing art cards: the Jolly Balloon Man. Walk us through the process of designing a jester who inflates decapitated heads by blowing into their severed necks.

The concept that [Senior Game Designer] Emily Teng wrote had the germ of the idea in that [this

character would] keep trophies like a hunter. I recruited Campbell White to work on that; he's an incredible artist who can see anything and just make it real. We sent him that idea and he came back with something that we had to tone down — if you'd have given it to someone, they'd have gone nuts!

Considering how long MTG has been in existence and how many of your team members have worked together for decades, how do you ensure that each of your creations remains original?

The first thing you do is make an idea that's close to your inspiration. There are geniuses who come up with something new from the very beginning but 99% of the time, you're copying the greats. If you're a classical artist, you're going to grab a Michelangelo piece and draw it the best you can. If you're a horror director, you're going to think of a theme that people have done many times and then give it your own spin — maybe a couple of spins. It's very much the same process here.

We come up with the most obvious solution first, and sometimes it

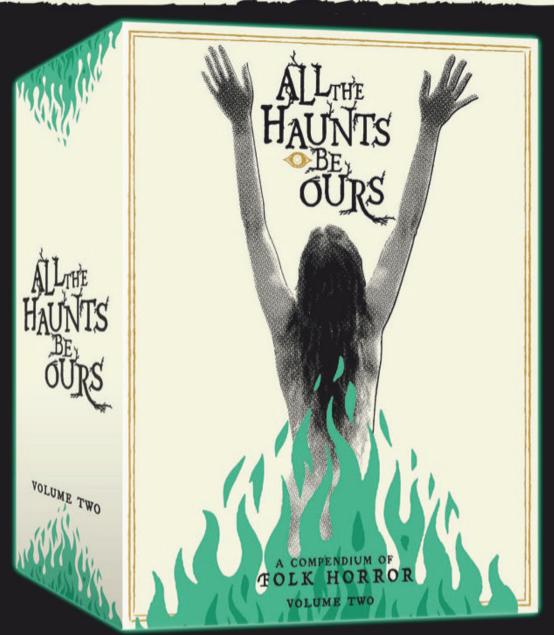
works, sometimes it's enough. But other times, my answer is, "Let's do something else." So, we do another and another and another — a great example of that is Valgavoth. We started with the Mothman, but he became so much more.

When building your own black deck, what cards are you including?

I have a deck that's my baby. When I saw Marina Vendrell's Grimoire, I had to put that in. Overlord of the Floodpits is one that I want to put in, and Overlord of the Mistmoors is another. I want to figure out how to build around Valgavoth, as both versions of him are very cool. I felt like Valgavoth when making *Duskmourn*, so I want to play like Valgavoth as well.

"ALL FOLK HORROR IS UNIFIED BY A CENTRAL THEME: THAT CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY IS A CRUST OVER SOMETHING DARK, INEXPLICABLE, OTHER. FOLK HORROR, LIKE THE OLD WAYS, WILL FIND YOU BEFORE YOU FIND IT."

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by Ramsey Campbell

s Scott reached the brow of West Kirby the dawn Atried to prise up the basalt sky behind him. Its fierce etched the shadows of three islands across the beach towards the distant sea. The sight inspired him to drive down to the promenade, where scattered cars were parked. A few hectic dogs and their sedate owners were celebrating the desertion of the beach. A dark shrill cloud of birds sailed up from the sand as hound dashed at them. Scott leaned on the chilly railing barnacled with dew and watched a woman stumble at speed down the nearest concrete ramp, tugged by a pair of dogs so lengthy they looked elongated by a widescreen lens. She unleashed them to race











BARELY OUT OF HER TEENS, THE AUSTRALIAN FILMMAKER BEHIND *SO VAM* AND *T BLOCKERS*RETURNS TO WRECK THE HALLS WITH *CARNAGE FOR CHRISTMAS*



s of now, an Alice Maio Mackay movie is practically a subgenre unto itself. Raised in Adelaide, Australia, the transgender filmmaker first made waves on the scene at age sixteen, when her debut feature *So Vam* (2021) premiered at Salem Horror Fest and instantly caught attention for its confident bonding of gapra trapes in a guest.

for its confident bending of genre tropes in a queer, stylish, no-budget package. Then followed *Bad Girl Boogey* (2022), *T Blockers* (2023), and *Satranic Panic* (2023) in very short order; three cheeky, lo-fi horror features that metamorphosed tales of haunted masks, ancient parasites, and cult murders into Day-Glo ruminations on bigotry, patriarchy, and self-loathing, all with a bratty, subversive edge. Now aged twenty, with her teenage years officially behind her, Mackay's *Carnage for Christmas* is taking on the most bone-chilling reality of queer adulthood: going home for the holidays.

"[The film is] pretty universal," asserts Mackay. "Coming home, coming to terms with all those dynamics, but it's also [about] taking down a serial killer."

Carnage for Christmas tells the tale of true-crime podcaster Lola (Jeremy Moineau) who finds herself back in her small town for the first time since her transition, with memories of murder and a boogeyman from her childhood known as the Toymaker dancing in her head. While staying with her sister Danielle (Domi-

nique Booth), the violent death of a friend reignites her interest in the case, leading Lola to seek the truth as only an amateur gumshoe can. With a sick slasher Santa, an even sicker techno remix of "Dance of the Sugar Plum"

Fairy," and enough red stuff to trigger Rudolph into an early menstrual cycle, Mackay brings a sweet sense of sacrilege and satire to the jolliest time of the year.

Interestingly, the director is no fan of true crime, but realized the mod-

ern obsession with bite-sized tales of murder most foul would be an easy way to tell a story with more telegenic roots.

"We wanted to make a throwback to the Pamela Sue Martin [version of] *Nancy Drew, Murder, She Wrote* era of TV," she explains. "But we wanted to do that with a trans lens and make it R-rated and really gnarly."

Influenced as it may be by stuffy mysteries-of-theweek, Mackay's creative vision couldn't be further away stylistically, though she readily admits to going for a certain teen drama look that sets it apart from the rest of her already expansive filmography.

"From the very first feature I did, I knew that the world I wanted to create was hyper-stylized and kind of poppy," she recalls. "[I often] use colour as an additional character; [onscreen] we have queer safe spaces in clubs and homes and it's a bi/trans kind of lighting scheme that's neon and super colourful, [while] for the villains it's grungier greens and oranges. Just using colours to enhance the world."

The young director's love of stylization comes directly from her absolute favourite horror director Rob Zombie (Ready to feel old? Her introduction to his cinema was 2019's *3 From Hell*), with whom she shares a flair for



cartoonish mayhem and a certain good-tastebe-damned, punk rock attitude. But from a storytelling standpoint, her major influence is less typical for a horror fan.

"Kevin Smith is one of my biggest inspirations," she says, citing the hangout vibe of his work as central to what she likes to do with her ensembles of young queer people. "It's not that common, [even] within queer cinema, to see trans women just hanging out with other trans women. I'm just writing things that I didn't see growing up."

Mackay stresses that when approaching every project, genre subversion is secondary to writing believable relationships – not only in order to better connect with modern audiences but to avoid falling into the trappings of well-worn stereotypes and clichés. Last year's *T Blockers*, for example, grew out of a desire for Mackay to explore "evil, slimy men," specifically "chasers" (cisgender males who fetishize transgender women), but to do so from an empowering angle meant harnessing the genre's ability to blend fantasy with reality.

"[THROUGH HORROR] YOU CAN GO TO FURTHER EXTREMES."

— filmmaker Alice Maio Mackay

"We made these men literal parasites to tell it from an angle that made sense for these characters," she explains. "I could have told a [grounded] story but I feel it'd be kind of depressing because there's no real world in which these characters are going to kill these shitty men — they're just going to have to deal with them and then the film ends. [As opposed to] getting to watch these trans characters actually reclaim their power and fight back against these alien villains, which I hope is cathartic. [Through horror] you can go to further extremes and push things that you wouldn't be able to do if it was just a non-genre film."

Mackay is clear in stating that there isn't really a trans genre space outside of what she herself is trying to create, citing Brad Michael Elmore's *Bit*, *The Craft: Legacy*, and *Black Christmas* (2019) as rare examples that meant a lot to her starting out. This very scarcity seems to be the reason she not only centres trans narratives, but makes them blatant, subtitling *Carnage for Christmas* as *A Transgender Holiday Film by Alice Maio Mackay*. Still, Mackay acknowledges that trans representation is only as effective as it is realistic and relatable.

"I'm not going to hide the fact that I'm a trans filmmaker," she says. "In terms of representation, there's this sanitization of queer and trans characters, especially the very few trans women





Horror For The Holidays: A true-crime podcaster confronts her past in more ways than one in **Carnage for Christmas**.

characters we see on TV. They have to uphold these standards morally: how they look and present. In my work, trans characters can do what cis characters can do – they can fuck up."

Working on shoestring budgets and with small crews from the land down under, Mackay has amassed a team of consistent collaborators, many of whom she's been working alongside since her first gigs volunteering on local Adelaide productions and her initial run of short films. But her rising star has also caught the attention of other Aussie creatives working in the genre, namely Adele Shearwin, who provided *Carnage for Christmas*'s holly jolly gore effects right after wrapping on Danny and Michael Philippou's 2023 sleeper hit *Talk to Me*.

"Australia is obviously a lot smaller than America," says Mackay, "but then again, where I grew up and where we shoot, out there it is even smaller: it's not Melbourne, it's not Sydney. I'm thankful that crews and stuff that work on all these big projects come by."

Mackay counts herself lucky that crowdfund-

ing and the attention of streamers like Shudder has allowed her to continue cranking out micro-budget marvels, but asserts that, at the end of the day, indie filmmaking is about the sheer will to get it done.

"As corny as it sounds, I think just making the film is important," she says. "In Australia, you can apply for grants, but [no matter where you are] it's always a long uphill battle. If you have a story to tell and the desire to tell it, I feel you should just do it by any means that you can."

As for what's on the horizon for a young filmmaker with several features already under her belt, Mackay is happy to see where things lead.

"I want to keep making the films I'm making," she says, "and hopefully with bigger budgets, more resources, and just keep working with people I admire.

Wherever it takes me, I guess I will go."



SWISS MISS

GET AWAY

Starring Nick Frost, Aisling Bea and Sebastian Croft Directed by Steffen Haars Written by Nick Frost Shudder

The promise of a collaboration between director Steffen Haars (for those familiar with the berserk Dutch *New Kids* comedies he co-helmed

and co-starred in) and Shaun of the Dead/Hot Fuzz's Nick Frost only pays off in the last twenty minutes or so of this 86-minute feature. Up to that point, Get Away coasts along on familiar horror/comedy conceits that make it a disappointment, if not the reported disaster of their other new collaboration, Krazy House (which this writer hasn't seen, but the reviews have been pretty dire).

Get Away was originally titled Svälta, after the Swedish island where its central family heads for vacation, despite its

dreadful past (as seen in a 200-years-ago prologue) and more recent two-and-a-half years of pandemic quarantine. The Smiths are traditional cinematic types: Dad Richard (a shaggy Frost) is chipper, enthusiastic, and oblivious to the obvious, mom Susan (Aisling Bea) is more centred and sensible, and teenage kids Sam (Sebastian Croft) and Jessie (Maisie Ayres) are sullen and resentful about being dragged along on this jaunt. There's an encounter with a scary, doomsaying diner proprietor along the way (check), dour and ominous Svälta locals (check), and a detective (Ville Virtanen) poking around the island (check). Not enough that's clever or surprising is done with these standard ingredients, and

genuine laughs and thrills are sparse until we eventually get to the ultraviolent payoff.

The extreme bloodletting is triggered by a major revelation at about the hour mark, so it won't be discussed in detail here. Suffice to say that it delivers the over-the-top, splattery goods, with Haars and Frost completely unfettered in their pursuit of sick laughs, and their evident glee at revelling in comic carnage is infectious. But is it worth muddling through the long, middling setup to get to this good stuff? As

with many vacations, your mileage may vary, and some may feel the destination isn't worth the journey.

KEN MICHAELS

WHAT LIES BEQUEATH

INHERIT THE WITCH

Starring Cradeaux Alexander, Rohan Quine and Heather Cairns Written and directed by Cradeaux Alexander BayView Entertainment

Writer/director/star Cradeaux Alexander has smashed together a rather complex plot for this micro-budget modern Gothic, involving fractured relationships, a big fat inheritance, and a family

history of witchcraft – but I'll be bolloxed if I can make out the piddling details like how or why.

After an opening flashback to a family birthday party harshed by occult dabblings, said same family reunites, present-day, in the English countryside to squabble over the estate that the recently dirt-



napped patriarch has left behind. It's plain that these people couldn't stand each other in the first place, so when we toss in greed, spellcasting, hallucinations, and murder, this gathering seems unlikely to conclude with a heartfelt "Auld Lang Syne." Not that there's anything wrong with such unpleasantries – family angst has provided legit dramatic fodder since times biblical – but a tad

more context and motivational clarity among all the bitchy scheming, paranormal and otherwise, could have gone a long way. How is it possible for anything this talky to remain this vague?

For all the old resentments and tangled emotions we're expected to buy into, it's hard to imagine that these people ever did anything but skulk around a country estate trying to off each other. (Half the cast seems to be intermittently channelling Gloria Swanson, or maybe just Carol Burnett doing Gloria Swanson — remember that recurring sketch?) There are a few decent jolts in the second half, but too little, too late and too far between. "What have we done?" one character keeps whingeing over and over toward the end. Well, sugar-tits, if you ever figure it out, let me know.

JOHN W. BOWEN

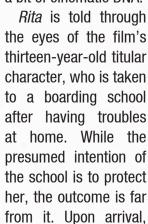
SCREAM COME TRUE

RITA

Starring Giuliana Santa Cruz, Ángela Quevedo and Alejandra Vásquez Written and directed by Jayro Bustamante Shudder

In Guatemala in 2017 an unfathomable tragedy struck the Virgen de la Asunción Safe Home for girls and left the country in shock. Not only did 41 girls aged between fourteen and seventeen perish in a fire, it was clear that many of the supervising adults were at fault, and had acted with cruelty. The reality of this collective anguish has been brought to the screen by writer/director Jayro Bustamante, best known perhaps for his

2019 film *La Llorona*, of which *Rita* shares quite a bit of cinematic DNA.



she realizes that the girls are sorted into violently tribe-like cliques based on animals or mythical figures, and assimilation into these groups is key to survival. Amid the brutal peer violence and politics lies a heartwarming thread of support and camaraderie between Rita and a few of her fellow classmates, but the real danger comes from the teachers and administrators.

This fantastical filter through which Rita makes the best of her circumstances softens the harder edges of the turf wars that break out between the girls, but the brutality of these factions is undeniable. This all makes the atmosphere of *Rita* otherworldly and tense, where life is unpredict-



able and nothing is ever quite as it seems. The real-life origins of this story make *Rita* both a difficult and important watch — these girls deserve to have their stories told with beauty and empathy, and Bustamante delivers on both fronts.

DEIRDRE CRIMMINS

MEMENTO GORY

DIRECTOR'S CUT

Starring Louis Lombardi, Tyler Ivey and Danielle Kotch Written and directed by Don Capria Onetencrew Films

Lamb of God shreds over the opening credits of *Director's Cut*, from writer/director Don Capria, whose eclectic resume includes directing music videos and short films, writing about American true crime, and drumming for hardcore punk band Skarhead.

In the film, members of the unofficially Slip-knot-inspired alt-rock band The Suicide Disease are down on their luck following the death of a friend. Lead singer Jay (Tyler Ivey), bassist Menace (Brandy Ochoa), drummer Juan (Louis Rocky Bacigalupo), and guitarist John (Greg Poppa) believe that a music video is their best option to draw the crowds back in. After they receive a message from a mysterious man named Mister Director (Louis Lombardi) offering to shoot their video for free, the band hits the road for Pennsylvania with Jay's girlfriend Jen (Haley Cassidy) and John's girlfriend Val (Danielle Kotch). Driv-

en nearly 100% by angst, the plot meanders through dated pronoun humour and Rancid merch until the true nature of Mister Director and his assistant Babs (Lucy Hart) is unsurprisingly revealed.

I can respect a film that displays its low-budget status on its jean jacket sleeve (an ARRI light ballast is used as a generator and a character wears a Steadicam brace as a vest), but the film's true saving grace is the large, abandoned mansion in which the majority of it takes place. The intricate architecture and naturally present leading lines are efficiently shot by cinematographer Bliss Bussant, Capria's director of photography from his music video days, making for an intriguing (though somewhat sparse) set piece.

The expletive-filled dialogue and subplot threads feel like a first draft for most of the runtime and the ham factor that the cast chews them with (in particular lvey and Lombardi) doesn't allow for the audience to take the film seriously, ultimately resulting in an overly dramatic effort that lacks in scares. Credit to the hair/makeup/wardrobe departments for nailing the aesthetic, and kudos to Kotch and Poppa for their juxtaposingly grounded performances.

RJ NADON

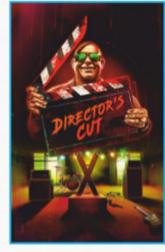
PANDEMIC ZOMBIES

DIE ALONE

Starring Carrie-Anne Moss, Douglas Smith and Jonathan Cherry Written and directed by Lowell Dean Quiver Distribution

To find a zombie film in 2024 that tears at the heartstrings as well as the throat is a minor miracle, so credit to writer/director Lowell Dean (*Wolfcop*, *Dark Match*) for crafting an elegant horror-drama that holds its share of surprises in this well-gnawed subgenre.

Douglas Smith (TV's *Clarice*) stars as Ethan, a young amnesiac looking for his girlfriend Emma (Kimberly-Sue Murray) in a post-apocalyptic wasteland (actually rural Saskatchewan). They've become separated after fleeing the societal breakdown caused by a global virus turning most of the population into plant-like creatures dubbed "The Reclaimed." Ethan is taken in by the relentlessly capable Mae (Carrie-Anne Moss: *The Ma*-





OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE GOES TO THE LAKE

CONJUGAL CASTRATION



LOON LAKE

11/29 Productions

I write this from my cottage up in Northeastern Ontario, my sanctuary from the maddening crowd of the city. There's nothing quite like cracking open an ice-cold beer and firing up my laptop to watch and review a couple of movies in the quiet countryside. But all that aforementioned peace and tranquility was shot to shit mere seconds after starting

this sick puppy of a film about a couple who travel to their cottage to celebrate their wedding anniversary until the wife finds out that her husband is a gambler, kidnapper, murderer, and a (gasp!) bigamist who plans to sell her to pay off his gambling debts. Rife with horrendous editing, directing, and acting, this particular DVD now rests at the bottom of a cold Canadian lake for all eternity – apologies to the fish! **BODY COUNT:** 5

BEST DEATH: Hacksaw penis-ectomy!

NOT ROCKET SCIENCE



LANDING LAKE

High Octane Pictures

I had high hopes for this outing about a group of research technicians who travel deep into the woods to fix a satellite relay station but are suddenly waylaid when they witness a plane crash and head out to help the survivors. What starts out as a pretty straightforward rescue mission quickly devolves into a struggle for life and sanity when the nerds

find themselves being preyed upon by an unknown force causing strange visions and bizarre deaths. Though competently filmed, *Landing Lake* plays out like a shitty episode of *Doctor Who* and features a bunch of disparate characters who spend most of the movie yelling at each other as they try to discover who or what is fucking with them. Turns out that these guys' biggest enemy was their agents' inability to get them better acting gigs

BODY COUNT: 7

BEST DEATH: Turned inside out and melted!

ALL SWAGGER, NO DAGGER



SOUL LAKE

Homestead Entertainment

Many years ago, I reviewed a horrible movie called *Ax 'Em* whose cast was being hunted by a serial killer at a remote cabin in the woods. That movie suffered from inept directing, shoddy camerawork, and subpar acting. Three decades later, directors Lawrence Gable and Bryan Martin have managed to channel the worst bits of that travesty and

churned out an equally abhorrent movie once again featuring a similar cast in the woods, but this time they're being slaughtered by the ghost of a young man whose murdered body was dumped in the nearby lake. The body count might be high, but the directors seemed more intent on showing off their buddies' streetwear brands and focusing on the derrières and bustlines of every girl who wanders across the screen – and yet, it doesn't even have gratuitous nudity in it!

BODY COUNT: 18

BEST DEATH: Sliced while squatting for a pee!

trix) whose various entreaties stall him from searching for Emma. Does Mae know something Ethan doesn't? And is she as kind and concerned as she seems?

Obviously written in response to COVID-19, with an early scene of anti-maskers protesting overworked hospital staff stirring both anger at the protesters and empathy for the doctors and nurses, *Die Alone* is nonetheless much more than a pandemic-era zombie film. Indeed, its brilliance lies not only in its manipulation of genre expec-



tations but its willingness to go as dark as it needs to. That means that the ending is not only sad and shocking but – just maybe – happy too. Dean's return to his *Wolfcop* collaborators means we get a great turn by Jonathan Cherry as a possibly dangerous stranger also looking for a loved one, as well as beautifully macabre creature FX from Emersen Ziffle, the man behind *Wolfcop*'s awesome makeup. But it's Moss's performance that amazes, and it's a pleasure to see her given a full-throated role that encompasses cold-blooded competence and open-hearted vulnerability.

An intimate film despite its end-of-the-world scope, check out *Die Alone* for further proof that the zombie genre is indeed undead.

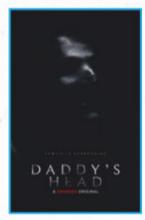
SEAN PLUMMER

GRIEF MOTIF

DADDY'S HEAD

Starring Julia Brown, Rupert Turnbull and Nathaniel Martello-White Written and directed by Benjamin Barfoot Shudder

Though the title is admittedly a touch silly, *Daddy's Head* is played straight and entirely serious. Isaac (Rupert Turnbull) has just lost his father in a sudden fatal accident, leaving him in the care of his new, young stepmom Laura (Julia Brown). With his mother also dead and buried on the sprawling grounds of their modern estate, Isaac must try to



accept being raised by a woman who has only ever barely tolerated the idea of being a stepmom. Just as he and Laura start digesting their grief and getting to know each other, something funny starts happening out in the woods.

Daddy's Head tries to tap on menace while it pulls at the heartstrings, but the result feels both specific and undefined, and it never quite wields its vagaries to proper dramatic effect. Whatever lurks in the woods conveniently operates on its own rules, but that makes it tricky to invest in the escalating doom. The film does, however, provide a thick atmosphere for Isaac and Laura to simmer in their own personal anguish. Neither of them ever wanted to be left together to cope

LAST CHANCE LANCE



in this cold, grey, concrete, and isolated house. As each of them turns to their own vices to numb their pain and pass the nights, the film makes a good case for each as sympathetic and flawed characters.

These rich players are what keeps *Daddy's Head* watchable, but they can only do so much. A few jump scares here and there and ghastly apparitions (or are they?) try to bring terror to the forefront, but the film overall never quite sticks the landing.

DEIRDRE CRIMMINS

A HORROR MOVIE... NOT?

THE UNRAVELING

Starring Sarah Zanotti, Sam Brooks and Katherine Morgan Directed by Kd Amond Written by Kd Amond and Sarah Zanotti The Horror Collective

While recovering from a traumatic brain in-

jury suffered during a car accident, Mary (Sarah Zanotti) comes to suspect that her husband Grayson (Sam Brooks: *Fear Street: Part Two*) isn't really her husband Grayson. Or maybe that

she herself isn't really Mary. In fact, is anyone the same person she knew before the accident? Did she wake up after the crash in a parallel universe, or does she just really like *Interstellar*?

There's a tantalizing mystery at this film's core, but many of the – ahem – unravelling tendrils of it are ultimately undeveloped as genre trappings appear and disappear at random. A shadowy figure here, some black goo there, a secret box of newspaper clippings about quantum physics... they all hint at possibilities

that remain frustratingly out of reach as the film refuses to fully commit to its horror/sci-fi leanings.

Moreover, figuring out Mary's new reality alongside her is difficult as we see very little of her pre-accident life for comparison. She is

> in a near-constant state of distress throughout the movie, but the stakes feel low when we're merely told rather than shown how much everyone around her has supposedly changed. That we end up invested in Mary's plight at all owes less to the narrative itself and more to the strong work of both Zanotti and Brooks, who manage to find compelling ways of working through seemingly endless variations of "You're not my husband!" / "I am, it's me, babe, I swear" exchanges.

Zanotti and Kd Amond – who previously released 2021's *Faye*, another woman-centred









ON THE SLAB: FIRST PERSON FRIGHTS

10-79

7:56 mins/YouTube via POP Films' Channel

This one opens with two police officers responding to a call in an innocuous neighbourhood in the dead of night. With no backup available and no signs of life inside, they decide to enter the residence to investigate. They find nothing at first, but then a woman's piercing scream leads



them into a waking nightmare. 10-79 is a recent offering from POP Films, an independent production company from Pennsylvania consisting of trio Christian Fescine, Everett Lauster, and Kayla Orben (the latter two appear in the film as the cops with the former taking director duties). POP's style is slick and they have produced more than a dozen short films over the last decade, which gives further proof that if you want to make movies, just get out there and do it!

THE SUN HAS DIED

18:46 mins/YouTube via Hunchback Media's Channel

Anette (Anette Støvelbæk) arrives at a new cleaning job at a kindergarten just as a storm rolls in. She goes about her duties, trying to not let her fear of thunder get the better of her, but then the unsettling phone calls begin. Also, a menacing figure is prowling around outside. She calls the police, but will they get there in time? *The Sun Has Died* is one of the most effective POV horror short films out there; Danish director Daniel Bødker Sørensen has an uncanny ability to elicit the anxiety felt by Anette's solitary and vulnerable position onto the viewer. It is also technically sound, using its perspective beyond mere gimmick and constructing well-crafted jump scares that still manage to work even after multiple viewings.

MY HOUSE WALK-THROUGH

12:00 mins/YouTube via nana825763's Channel

This last one is an oldie but a goodie, as evidenced by four million views on YouTube. As the uploader describes, it is not a horror video, but simply him filming inside his house. Our humble narrator takes us through his abode while a typhoon loudly rages outside. With each passing hallway, the surroundings become more decrepit and waterlogged to the point where the viewer fears what might lurk around each corner. *My House Walk-through* was the brainchild of mysterious Japanese YouTuber nana825763, who was likely heavily influenced by the Sony PlayStation game demo *P.T.* that lit up the internet (and PS4 hard drives) two years prior. The production and sound design on this short are top notch and a testament to nana825763's skills — especially when you watch his accompanying (and surprisingly upbeat) making-of video, showing just how simple it was to achieve.

JAY CLARKE

dark drama, together under their AZ If Productions banner – mesh well as collaborators, lending the film a performance and visuals that belie its small budget. But of all the questions you might ask while trying to figure out exactly what's going on in *The Unraveling*, the biggest is surely "How can a film full of horror movie tropes not actually be a horror movie in the end?"

STACIE PONDER

HELL AWAITS

THE WAIT

Starring Victor Clavijo, Pedro Casablanc and Ruth Díaz Written and directed by F. Javier Gutiérrez Film Movement

After an underwhelming foray into Hollywood that included being attached to the long-gestating remake of *The Crow* and the horror sequel *Rings* (2017), Spanish filmmaker F. Javier Gutiérrez returns to his home country with *The Wait*, a sun-bleached supernatural drama that explores the merciless consequences of greed and guilt.

Set in 1970s Andalusia, *The Wait* casts Victor Clavijo, star of Gutiérrez's apocalypse-themed 2008 debut *Before the Fall*, as Eladio, the groundskeeper for wealthy landowner Don Francisco (Pedro Casablanc). Accompanying him in this hardscrabble life is Eladio's unsatisfied wife Marcia (Ruth Díaz) and their son Floren (Moisés Ruiz). The boy shows no interest in following in his father's footsteps but eagerly takes his first job helping his father out in a hunt he is organizing on Don Francisco's estate. The simmering tension in Eladio's marriage boils over when he reluctantly takes a bribe to allow too many hunters to participate and his son is

accidentally shot dead. Overwhelmed by grief, Marcia takes her life and Eladio spirals into a despair that may not only take his life but his soul.

Gutiérrez's first film in seven years looks great. He is a talented filmmaker who, alongside his long-time director of photography Miguel A. Mora, conveys the arid desolation of the cursed land and



the desperation of Eladio's isolated existence. The director also knows how to convey a lot of information without much dialogue – a.k.a. he knows how to direct – with mere looks between Eladio and Marcia conveying years of unspoken unhappiness and resignation. But, beyond its aesthetic success, *The Wait* ultimately underwhelms, as its discussions of evil and guilt don't go deep enough to have a profound impact. A few images of body horror and a late-in-the-game conspiracy are more confusing than chilling, making this film not worth, ahem, the wait.

SEAN PLUMMER



If you think Mormons canvassing your neighbourhood is a nightmare, look out for A24's Heretic, soon to be knocking at your door

Pode Foith

he set-up for *Heretic* is simple, but the consequences are anything but: two missionaries out to spread the good word end up at the doorstep of a man who is more than happy to talk religion, if they will just step inside for some blueberry pie. "I won't keep you if you wish to leave," says resident Mr. Reed (Hugh Grant), "but I want you to choose

which door to go through based on your faith." The two doors he puts before his Mormon guests, Sister Barnes (Sophie Thatcher: *Boogeyman*) and Sister Paxton (Chloe East: *True Blood*), are marked with the words "Belief" and "Disbelief" in chalk. What follows is a harrowing game of theological cat-and-mouse as the girls find themselves trapped and tested by a lunatic.

Anchored by a deliciously devilish turn from Grant as a religious obsessive lording over an H.H. Holmes-like charnel house, the new title from Midwestern genre maestros Scott Beck and Bryan Woods (*A Quiet Place*, *Haunt*) out November 1 is a provocative outing sure to ruffle feathers and leave viewers contemplative after taking them through a literal and theological maze that challenges devotional foundations.

"Scott and I have always been, in equal parts, fascinated and terrified by religion," shares Woods. "We thought it could be interesting to tell a religious story with a conversation movie like Robert Zemeckis' *Contact*, but as a horror film. Not just a movie about religion, but a dissection of religion."

"We thought it would be fun to make something where the movie ends and the audience conversation really starts," adds Beck. "We started discussing it about ten years ago, immersing ourselves in studying religions, and finally got to the point a year ago were we felt ready to write the script."

As with all of their projects, *Heretic* was a challenging pitch to sell until they were able to find the right home in A24, and the right leading man to seal the deal. Indeed, for those of us who grew up knowing the 64-year-old actor for his leading man roles as the quintessential hapless Brit in '90s rom-coms, *Heretic* presents both a welcome back and an initial WTF moment. Grant's performance is spellbinding, delivering voluminous (and often historically referential) dialogue with obvious joy and sinister elegance,

a direct result of working very closely with the filmmakers and sharing their fascination with the material. In fact, several of his long single-takes were met with applause from the crew on the Vancouver, British Columbia set.

"For our money, he's one of the great actors of all time," says Woods, "and perhaps he's not always thought of in that context but this role, Mr.

Reed, was extremely hard to play."

Beck elaborates: "He combed over literally every single word in the script to get to a place of understanding, and if he had questions, it would spark a conversation between the three of us until we got to the bottom of it."

By Justin Beahm

Not to be outdone, his co-stars Thatcher and East maintain a disciplined intensity for the duration of the movie, playing off each other and opposite Grant as missionaries forced to confront their values in a game of life and death. Beck and Woods' script provides rare depth to the often-lampooned caricature of the door-to-door zealot, highlighting the tumultuous times we currently inhabit.

"There are two things that really interested us in terms of vulnerability and two versions of vulnerability," explains Beck. "There's the concept where, as a missionary, you are putting yourself in vulnerable situations and hopefully there's never any issues, but every now and then, it's this uncomfortable situation of going into somebody's home that I think presses a nerve for anybody, frankly. But there's also the vulnerability of getting your beliefs

QUESTION EVERYTHING

HERE THE COMMENT OF THE PROPERTY OF THE P

challenged."

"We approached the material with a lot of love, and a lot of fear also," admits Woods. "Religion is really beautiful, and it can be really scary. Everybody has their own personal beliefs, and we're big believers [that] people should have their personal beliefs. It's actually the imposing beliefs on people that is perhaps most offensive to us, when you force people to think or believe a certain way. And I do think that the movie is maybe challenging that more than anything else. That might be a controversial thought or might not be a controversial thought. It'll be interesting to hear people who are enraged or offended by the movie. We actually look forward to that conversation."

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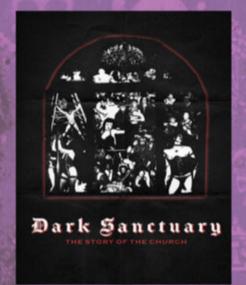




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J-HORROR RISING SHOWCASES JAPAN'S SUPERNATURAL HISTORY

Say "J-horror" to many people, and it conjures up the mental image of a spooky young woman with long, dark hair covering her face. While this may be a recurring image among the many supernatural features that hailed from Japan in the wake of Hideo Nakata's Ringu (1998), the new Arrow Video Blu-ray boxed set J-Horror Rising demonstrates the many themes this trend has explored. The inspirations on the seven films contained within it range from the centuries-old legend of the Kuchisake-onna (2007's Carved: The Slit-Mouthed Woman) to the 1995 Kobe earthquake (2000's Isola: Multiple Personality Girl), and the approaches range from traditional Gothic to the high-school drama of Persona (2000) to the mock-documentary stylings of Noroi: The Curse (2005).

The three aforementioned movies, along with *Shikoku* (1999), *Inugami* (2001) and *St. John's Wort* (2001), were all remastered for this U.S./ U.K. four-disc collection by Arrow, which has previously issued special editions of *Ringu*, *Juon, Dark Water, Pulse*, and other J-horror favourites. Jasper Sharp, who produced and oversaw the special features for *Rising*, notes, "Most of these films came out in Japan just around the time I started writing about Japanese cinema with Tom Mes, when we founded MidnightEye. com. So, I knew there were a lot of these kinds of films from the turn of the millennium that hadn't been widely circulated outside Japan yet. It seemed logical that there would be an interest

for these on Blu-ray from the same people who lapped up the previous releases."

Sharp, who directed the documentary The J-Horror Virus (coming soon to Shudder) with Sarah Appleton, says that the films contained in Rising were part of "a short-lived blip in which J-horror was commercially very successful at the Japanese box office, but hadn't found an overseas market yet. During this period, following Ringu's success, the studios rushed to pick up supernatural, sci-fi, or mystery novels or other media to adapt, then released the films on double bills pitched at a teenage audience. So, for example, Shikoku originally played Japanese cinemas supporting Ringu 2, while Isola: Multiple Personality Girl went out on a double bill with Ringu O. Persona, Inugami, and Shikoku were based on books, while St. John's Wort was based on the visual novel Otogiriso. Stylistically, all these films are very different, but there's a rationale for grouping them together.

"The two Kôji Shiraishi films, *Noroi* and *Carved*, don't fit comfortably within these categorizations," he adds. "However, the former, a pioneering found-footage film, was produced by Taka Ichise, the producer of the *Ringu* and *Ju-on* movies, while *Carved* definitely has many of the visual motifs and tone we associate with J-horror."

With the movies selected, Sharp and Appleton headed to Japan to shoot the bonus features.

"We aimed to track down as many people di-



rectly involved in the films as we could," Sharp says. "We got ahold of most of the directors, although sadly there were one or two we couldn't connect with. I was most excited that we were able to interview Ichise, because for me he's the most crucial part of J-horror's history, and in all my time working with Japanese cinema, I'd never directly crossed paths with him before."

In addition to the new on-camera interviews, the discs sport audio commentaries and video essays by Japanese cinema and folklore experts including Sharp, Mes, Amber T., Lindsay Nelson, Jonathan Clements, Julian Singleton, and Zack Davisson.

"I always like to include people who have a direct connection with Japan to talk about Japa-

nese films," Sharp explains. "People who know the language and culture and don't make too many projections or assumptions, as well as people familiar with the genre and the directors. Lindsay Nelson, for example, is a great scholar who has done a lot of work on recent Japanese horror, including Shiraishi's found-footage films, so she was a natural choice for his two films. Zack Davisson has written books about Japanese ghosts and ghost cats and various other folklore and urban legends, so he was great for the Carved commentary. Jonathan Clements has written more books on Asia than I can shake a stick at, so he was first call for *Inugami*, a folk-horror film, which would be very challenging for someone without his level of background knowledge. Since I first encountered these films years ago alongside Tom Mes, I knew we shared the same points of reference, and I let him choose which film he'd do his commentary on [Shikoku], while Amber T. was a great find in terms of a new generation of writer who loves horror and has lived in Japan."

Beyond all that, Sharp was able to pull together a wealth of supplemental material from the vaults of production company Kadokawa, including filmmaker and cast interviews, on-set footage, and deleted scenes. A good deal of this will be new to stateside and British viewers, as most of the movies haven't previously received extensive disc releases beyond their home country.

"The behind-the-scenes for *St. John's Wort* is particularly fun," Sharp says, "given how innovative that film's use of digicams and rudimentary CGI mixed with 35mm to create a video-game aesthetic was back at the time of its release. In terms of supplementary features, though, *Noroi* really steals the show. We've got everything from the Japanese releases for this, its first-ever home video release outside Japan."

And on top of *that*, the set comes with an illustrated book compiling essays by Sharp, Appleton, Amber T., Eugene Thacker, Anton Bitel, Mark Player, and Jim Harper.

"I wanted to really go to town on that, to editorially put something together that explained where these films came from and looked at their commonalities as much as their differences," says Sharp. "I was especially delighted that the





'philosopher of horror' Eugene Thacker, whose work I hold in very high regard, answered my call to contribute something that provided the bigger picture."

Though the supernatural sagas assembled in *J-Horror Rising* span nearly a decade, they collectively represent a very specific moment in time for Japanese filmmaking. It was a period when an approach to genre cinema was forged that continues to echo down to the present day.

"These movies are very important," says Sharp, who's continuing to work on future titles from Japan for Arrow, "as they showcase a homegrown cinema that local audiences loved and went on to influence filmmakers across the world. They all belong to that wave of titles that came after the early straight-to-video and television genre experiments of the late '80s/early

'90s, and a period when J-horror was at its commercial peak in Japan.

"To be honest," he continues, "most of these were films I'd already seen or was aware of from the time of their release, so it was a bit of a shock to realize how long ago this actually was - twenty or 25 years! But they've aged really well. Isola and Shikoku in particular, I believe, really suffered from comparisons with Ringu, but taken on their own merits, they are both very interesting time capsules. The big surprise for me, though, was Noroi. It was strange to see what a cult film it has become internationally in recent years, because back when it was released, I was living in Japan, keeping my ear pretty close to the ground in terms of what was coming out at the time, and I don't remember hearing anything about it!"





EAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Home Alone on Ocean Avenue by John W. Bowen

ven among hardcore fans of '70s horror, there are plenty – including my horrible self – who find 1979's *The Amityville Horror* a grossly overrated snooze, in which a good cast is squandered on half-assed scares barely adequate for a made-for-TV movie of its vintage. The superior 1982 prequel *Amityville II: The Possession*, while uneven as all get-out, remains sadly overlooked, albeit for some great ingredients rather than the sum thereof.

Amityville It's roots are complicated to say the least, loosely based on the real-life case of Ronnie "Butch" DeFeo, who murdered his parents and four siblings in 1974 (which in turn led to the

home's next tenants making infamously bogus claims of hauntings, which in turn led to multiple books, a mostly awful film franchise, and about a million lawsuits). Like its predecessor, *Amityville II* boasts a strong cast, led by the reliably skeevy Burt Young (*Chinatown*, *Rocky*), Jack Magner, and gorgeous, charismatic Diane Franklin. Sadly, it's stuffed to the tits with standard-issue demonic

possession and haunted house hokum – all of which was, by 1982, stale as an AMC Pacer's upholstery – not to mention a plague of underdeveloped plot points and frequently clunky dialogue. But. *But*.

Amityville II's ace in the hole is an extraordinary nine-and-a-half-minute sequence that begins just shy of the half-hour mark – basically the end of the first act – in which seventeen-year-old Sonny (Magner) finds himself home alone after the script concocts a flimsy-ass excuse to get the rest of the family out of the house for a bit. What ensues – as 112 Ocean Avenue's dastardly demon takes possession of poor, scared-shitless Sonny – is straight-up unprecedented, virtually a film-within-a-film. Magner unleashes one of the



most intense single-actor performances in horror movie history, orchestrated with tremendous assurance by director Damiano Damiani and his key crew members. It's such a jaw-dropping

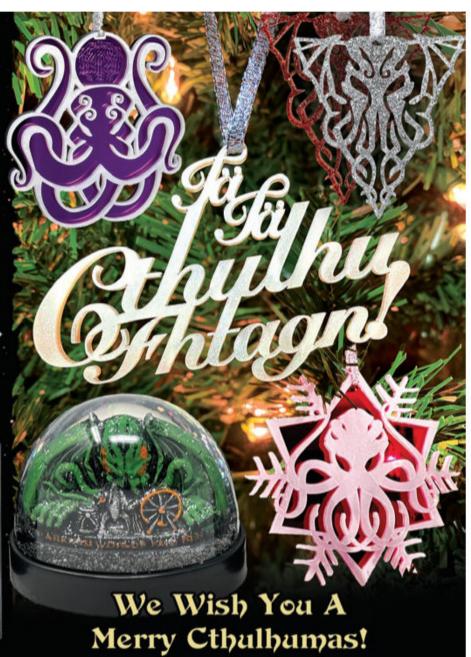
> sequence that, for the first time in the sordid history of the Basement, I'm actually compelled to break down the timeline. Ready?

> 28:54 – As Sonny watches the family drive away, the power goes off, followed by the sound of the front door slamming, then footsteps. Sonny grabs a hammer. 29:48 – In the second-floor hallway, a suitcase mysteriously flies at Sonny's head, and narrowly

misses. More weird noises, apparently coming from the basement. 30:17 to 33:17 - Like many a standard horror movie dumbass, Sonny goes down to the basement. Gets rifle from gun rack and loads it. Hears voices from Mysterious Basement Crawlspace and demands to know "Who's there?" Gets flashlight, warns Unseen Presence in Mysterious Basement Crawlspace that he's armed, in case this whole thing goes to court. Opens door to Mysterious Basement Crawlspace, goes in, then beats hasty retreat after finding living human arm sticking out of stone wall, then turns back and sees that it's disappeared. Unseen Presence from Mysterious Basement Crawlspace follows Sonny back out into main basement. Steam escapes overhead pipes in ominous fashion. Sonny runs back up to main floor. 33:18 - Sonny skulks around with gun and sweats profusely. As camera swoops overhead, Evil Dead-style, feet of several crewmembers who seem to be scrambling to get out of the shot - are fully visible at left side of frame, which is just even more jarring. Bowen jumps and makes frightened little girl noise. 34:24 - Sonny retreats back upstairs, pursued by Unseen Presence. Shuts self in bedroom but guess what? Unseen Presence has followed him in, so he shoots at it twice before the rifle is suddenly wrenched from his (not yet cold, dead) hands. Falls onto the bed, yelling "Nooo!" 36:40 - Cue full-on Argento lighting as makeup appliances on Sonny's neck begin to throb. He checks the mirror – not pretty. Begins screaming as more appliances on head and face begin to expand and distort. 37:32 to 38:18 - With the usual onslaught of slamming doors, spinning furniture, gas explosions, electrical fixtures arcing, foundation shaking, etc., 112 Ocean Avenue goes industry-standard-haunted-house-cattywampus. And SCENE.

And then the rest of the movie happens. Oh, and after all that, the uber-impressive Jack Magner (who bears an uncanny resemblance to *Boogie Nights*-era Mark Wahlberg) appeared in one more film (that tepid 1984 version of Stephen King's *Firestarter*), then up and retired from acting. Dude! Now get the hell out of my basement and kindly take this creepily incongruous human arm with you.









FILES FROM THE BLACK MUSEUM

THE LONG SHADOWS OF CLASSIC HORROR'S PAST

BY PAUL CORUPE

Devil in Disguise

"THE SEVENTH VICTIM REMAINS FASCINATING FOR THE WAY IT EXPOSES HOW A GENERIC COAT OF RESPECTABILITY CAN MAKE US ACKNOWLEDGE EVEN THE VILEST OF IDEAS."

t's said that evil comes in many forms, but few moviemakers were able to explore as many deviations as producer Val Lewton, who dominated the 1940s with a series of wartime shockers that still retain their frightful power today. While not the most prominent entry in Lewton's career at RKO, *The Seventh Victim* (1943) is undeniably one of his most interesting efforts, a film that has grown in reputation over the years for the way it departed from the usual supernatural horrors of the era to focus on the relatively new phenomenon of urban paranoia.

Recently released on Blu-ray from Criterion alongside another Lewton project, *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), *The Seventh Victim* is a timely reminder about the nature of evil.

Directed by Mark Robson under Lewton's watchful eye, the film hinges on an orphan's search for a missing family member. When her sister Jacqueline (Jean Brooks) mysteriously disappears, Mary (Kim Hunter) takes leave from an all-girls Catholic school in hopes of finding her. Arriving in New York City, she follows a trail of clues until she meets Jacqueline's former romantic partner, Gregory Ward (Hugh Beaumont), who describes her sister's obsession with suicide and reveals her involvement with a local occult group known as the Palladists. As her investigation progresses, Mary finally catches up with her sister, only to learn that the other members of the Palladists have planned a deadly fate for Jacqueline as punishment for discussing their group's existence with her psychiatrist (Tom Conway). Mary only has a short time to stop Jacqueline from becoming the seventh group member to have to pay for making the same mistake.

While *The Seventh Victim* remains notable as one of the first horror films centred around a satanic cult, viewers are often surprised when the Palladists are finally revealed as rather ordinary and unremarkable New Yorkers sipping tea in the shadows. Although their name refers back to a debunked 19th-century conspiracy theory about high-level Freemasons who worship Satan, the group depicted in the film appears to be a quiet gathering of well-dressed intellectuals who have adopted a decidedly fatalistic and amoral outlook — a far cry from the hedonistic, ritual-obsessed Satanists that later



became a mainstay of the horror genre. Forget about drinking blood and human sacrifices, the Palladists are so devoted to non-violence that they can only implore Jacqueline to drink a goblet of poisoned wine as atonement for breaking the group's secrecy rules.

If we understand the Palladists as philosophers rather than fiends, *The Seventh Victim* reveals itself as a cautionary tale about characters who have turned their back on the tradition of

moral principles. From the safe confines of her reli-

gious school, Mary's journey takes her through a basement restaurant (aptly known as Dante's) and into shadowy office buildings before uncovering the drawing room hideout of the Palladists and their nihilistic ideologies. But just like the cult's inconspicuous integration into big city life that makes it such a danger to lost souls like Jacqueline, it's hard not to reflect on how we've also come to accept remarkably dangerous and antisocial views in our modern discourse. It's become obvious, over the last decade or so, that when leading political and community figures are left free to indulge in everything from unchecked intolerance to outright fascist flirtations, these ideas are legitimized in a way that makes it much harder to agree to reject their obvious insidiousness. Even the Palladists in the film seem to escape any real consequences for their normalization of evil — while reprimanded for their treatment of Jacqueline, they are ultimately left to their own devices, preying on lonely individuals looking for a community to call their own.

Not all modern horror fans may agree with Lewton's seeming attack on atheism and other more existentialist beliefs, but *The Seventh Victim* remains fascinating for the way it exposes how a generic coat of respectability can make us acknowledge even the vilest of ideas. As opposed to the sinister goat-horned cult leaders that became mainstays in films such as *The Devil's Rain* (1975) and other satanic cinema, there's something chilling about the way you wouldn't even notice a Palladist in the street — one of the film's most prescient points. Even 75 years ago, before the era of astroturf social media campaigns and cynical political stunts, Robson and Lewton knew that evil is most effective when it's utterly and totally boring.





MURDER KINGDOM #1
Fred Van Lente
and Chris Panda
Mad Cave

BENEATH Steven S. DeKnight and Michael Gaydos ComiXology Originals THE STRANGE TALES OF OSCAR ZAHN VOLUME 1 Tri Vuong

Ten Speed Graphic

PATRA #1
James Robinson
and Scott Kolins
Dark Horse

PERMADEATH #1
Jonathan Chance, Rafael
Lanhellas and Dell Barras
Dead Sky Publishing

IN FOUR EIL BYPEDRO CABEZUELO

ou'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who hasn't heard of *The Lord of the Rings*, but the same can't be said about one of its main inspirations, the *Kalevala*. An epic Finnish poem from the 19th century, which itself was based on centuries' worth of folk tales and mythology, the *Kalevala* details the creation of Earth and the adventures of the wizard Väinämöinen, the warrior Lemminkäinen, and the blacksmith Ilmarinen (among others), as they traverse the Northern lands battling dark forces and magic on a quest for the Sampo, a legendary device that represents abundance and good fortune.

"Kalevala is the national epic of Finland," says writer Sami Makkonen. "Deep and rich in its mythology; so deep that Tolkien became 'fascinated by it.' The Kalevala begins with the traditional Finnish creation myth and then moves

on to stories where the mythical protagonists, like Väinämöinen (model for Gandalf) or Louhi, the Witch of the North, are trying to accomplish often impossible things and usually failing in their missions, which leads to tragedy and even worse problems. There is also the underworld Tuonela and lots of big creatures and battles. Basically magic, death, and grief."

Though well known in Finland and many parts of Europe, North Americans may not be as familiar with the epic, an oversight that

will hopefully be rectified soon with the publication of *Kalevala: The Graphic Novel*, adapted and drawn by Makkonen. For the Finnish creator, it was a chance to realize an artistic dream he'd had for many years.

SAMI MAKKONEN

"I had already noticed the potential and made a short comic about the *Kalevala* in high school as a thesis in art studies," he reveals. "It turned out, however, that my professional career as an artist began doing graphic novels in the U.S. instead of Finland and it was only after Gary Reed [Deadworld] suddenly and sadly passed away, plus Frank Beddor [Hatter M] moved to other businesses, that I suddenly found time to think again about my own projects. At this point I had done comics professionally for eight years so I felt I would be able to do Kalevala, which I knew would be a massive thing."

The results speak for themselves: a lavish and engrossing visual treat that touches on many of the epic's key themes

leval

and scenarios. For horror fans, however, there's an extra incentive to read it: just as Tolkien didn't shy away from horrific imagery in his saga, Makkonen has leaned heavily into the horror elements present in the orig-

inal tales and magnified them through his inimitable art style. Witches, giants, and various other creatures are present, as are numerous scenes of plague

and bloody violence, all expertly rendered under Makkonen's brush. But beyond this, the artist's choice of monochrome palettes, and rare use of bright colours, have a lingering effect on the winter landscapes, and the many lanky, often naked bodies. The result is a rather cold and bleak picture that adds another layer to the bone-chilling content.

ABLAZE





Kalevala: A horror retelling of Finland's national epic.

"I had noticed early on that many of the different adaptations of the epic story don't stress at all the horror elements, of which there are loads," notes Makkonen. "And me, being a lifetime devotee of horror and the occult, I just saw this as a big opportunity to tell the story in my way and emphasize these things. I wanted to show the beautiful sights of things that had not yet been shown visually by the artists of the past. Also, I really see this as a big saga worthy of a movie or a TV/streaming series and this is the way I [think] it should be done."

............

FOLLOW PEDRO ON X @PCABEZUELO

QUICK CUTS

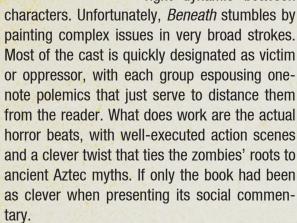
STEVEN S. DEKNIGHT MICHAEL GAYDOS

I've always found something unsettling about amusement parks, despite – or maybe because of – their superficially cheerful trappings. Perhaps writer Fred Van Lente was thinking along similar lines when he came up with *Murder Kingdom*, a murder mystery set within Florida's magical Storybook Kingdom. In it, disgruntled ticket-taker Tanith has just been thrust into a new role: the park's ersatz Sleeping Beauty, Briar Rose. The previous Rose disappeared under mysterious circumstances, something that doesn't concern Tanith until the dead bodies start popping up. Van Lente holds his cards close to the chest for the majority of the book, scattering clues like breadcrumbs on a trail. In the meantime, we get to know Tanith and much of the park itself, which promises to be a wild setting for the upcoming mayhem. With the elements in place and heads ready to roll, it's time to buckle up for the main attraction.



Tensions are high at the Texas-Mexico border, where a detention centre for illegal migrants is a battleground between racist guards, Mexican

detainees, enraged protestors, and hapless law enforcement caught in the middle... and that's before a bunch of subterranean, flesh-eating creatures dig their way up from beneath! Baseunder-siege stories are nothing new but when presented well, they remain highly effective — especially if you find the right dynamic between



Meet the latest paranormal detective and exorcist, Oscar Zahn. With the help of his trusty and somewhat strange assistant Agnes, Oscar embarks on a crusade against eldritch forces; not easy when you're a floating skull in a trench coat with a tendency to be possessed by a multi-tentacled

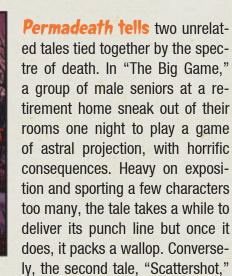
soul devourer. And so, we welcome *The Strange Tales of Oscar Zahn* to the ever-growing panoply of occult investigators, and a very hearty

welcome it is. In just a few tales, author Tri Vuong has created a character and universe that hearkens to Mignola's *Hellboy* yet can confidently stand on its own. The book is filled with oddball yet very relatable characters and a strong narrative structure that slowly reveals Oscar's background amidst other compelling scenarios that are often humorous but never at the expense of drama, suspense, or genuinely touching moments. Very highly recommended.

What would you do if you woke up in the middle of the woods, with no memory of who you were or how you got there, with a knife-wielding killer on your trail? If you're the protagonist of *Patra*, you run like hell. While the little girl's memory may be missing, some gaps are filled in with cuts to her hometown, where police find the grisly remains of her parents and three brothers. They are the latest victims of serial killer Jeremy

Jones, who has a penchant for slaughtering families and kidnapping the daughters in a twisted attempt to recreate his childhood relationship with his long-dead sisters. It's a demented enough scenario that's heightened by supernatural overtones, primarily the strange skull mask and huge knife that spontaneously appear on Patra whenever she's in dan-

ger. Inevitably, the answers will have to wait while Patra takes the reader on a fast-paced, fear-fraught journey to stay alive.



trades in the oldies for a set of teenagers, one of whom has been locked in his bedroom for days

trying to make a name for himself in online gaming. Living off junk food and energy drinks, Doyle is cheered on remotely by his two friends, tabulating the number of viewers that hop on to watch him beat the exhausting game. What could go wrong? Of the two tales, "Scattershot" is the most successful, due to a better pace, smaller cast, and its



macabre ending. Ironically, despite working with younger characters, it handles themes of loneliness, isolation, and tragedy better than the story set in a seniors' home, and is the one that sticks with you once the book is closed.





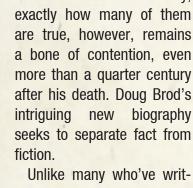
THE CIRCLE BOOKS

BORN WITH A TAIL: THE DEVILISH LIFE AND WICKED TIMES OF ANTON SZANDOR LAVEY

Doug Brod

Hachette Books

There are countless stories circulating about Church of Satan founder Anton Szandor LaVey,



Unlike many who've written about LaVey in the past, Brod has never been an ac-

olyte. He approaches his subject as the prolific journalist/editor he is and admirably spends the book's 368 pages attempting to untangle true stories from tall tales, with occasionally mixed results. As *Born With a Tail* effectively illustrates, despite anything else he may have been, at his heart LaVey was an unapologetic storyteller, an accomplished musician, and a consummate showman who harboured a lifelong fascination with befriending interesting people (Jayne Mansfield and singer Sammy Davis Jr., among them).

Through a careful combination of research, interviews, and evidence (backed up by a list of sources), Brod posits that despite its rituals, etc., LaVey formed the Church of Satan more as a way to invite like-minded outsiders into his fold and generate some income, than as a result of any genuine belief in Satan himself a thing that later caused a full-blown rift in the organization. ("Calling it a church," LaVey once admitted, "enabled me to follow the magic formula of nine parts outrage and one part social responsibility needed for success.") Brod also spends time dissecting the sad events following LaVey's death, when those closest to him fought an ugly battle over the future of the church, LaVey's legacy, and the contents of the famous Black House in San Francisco.

If everything you know about Anton LaVey and the Church of Satan has come from the mouths of fans and believers, *Born With a Tail* may well prove to be a revelation, as Brod finally detangles the myth from the man. Hail Satan!

MONICA S. KUEBLER

GHOST OF AN IDEA: HAUNTOLOGY, FOLK HORROR AND THE SPECTRE OF NOSTALGIA

William Burns
Headpress

Fear not: while the long, heady title seemingly announces a dusty academic tome, this book is actually quite accessible. That is, once you make it through the opening chapter, devoted to the hazy philosophical concept of "Hauntology" (i.e. "a longing for the disappeared or never happened"). Stressing that the ghosts of hauntology are not your usual apparitions, the author clarifies that "hauntology imagines history as ghosts that haven't yet been put to rest." It all gets clearer when these abstractions are seen in practice, in the works ranging from Lovecraft's The Shadow Out of Time to Peter Ackroyd's Hawksmoor and Alan Moore's From Hell. The book also has interesting things to say about the folk horror revival and the links between the found-footage format and nostalgia, with a strong stress on the mother of both: *The Blair Witch Project*.

One rarely finds a book that covers so wide a range (music, television, cinema, philosophy) with such authority and insight: whether dealing with Kubrick's *The Shining* (on which he shines a fresh, condensed light), obscure British TV shows, or unknown Brazilian and Peruvian

a Headowss Book

Ghost of an Idea

horror flicks, Burns has worthy things to say. His "Folk Horror Film Recommendations" walk far off the beaten path and are certain to reveal precious, unknown titles to even the most seasoned horror buffs. Equally revelatory is "An A-Z of Folk Horror Music," a list of albums to listen to while reading the author's

interviews with several neo-folk and dark ambient musicians.

All in all, *Ghost of an Idea* is an uneven book (it ends with some average film reviews and concert reports), but its better half will be quite sufficient to widen your horror horizons.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

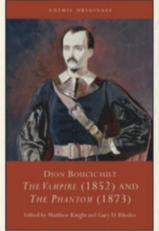
DION BOUCICAULT:
"THE VAMPIRE" (1852) AND
"THE PHANTOM" (1873)

Matthew Knight and Gary D. Rhodes, eds

University of Wales Press

Readers with an interest in Gothic literature will want to make note of the new Gothic Originals series from University of Wales Press, which is bringing select works from the 19th century back into print, with new introductions providing information about the works' creation and historical context (including critical reception and place within the greater Gothic landscape), and in the case of Boucicault's two plays collected here, a full accounting of reworks and revisions.

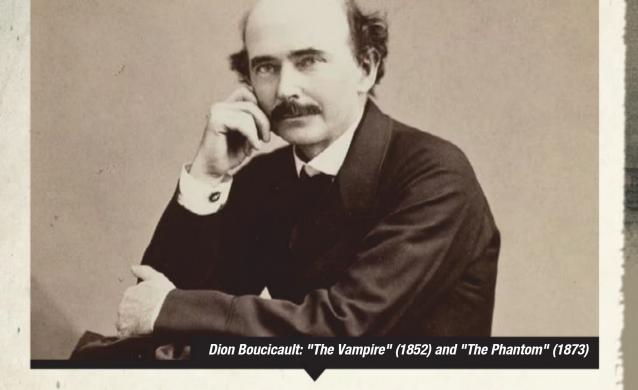
As the editors explain in the introduction, Dion Boucicault was one of "the most prominent and prolific dramatists on the world stage" in his time. Indeed, Queen Victoria was in the audience when *The Vampire*, a Phantasm, Related in Three Dramas opened at London's Royal Princess's Theatre on June



14, 1852. (Additionally, she liked it enough to commission a portrait of Boucicault in the titular role.) However, Boucicault was also sensitive to criticism and would often rework his plays based on audience reception, which is how we arrive at *The Vampire* and *The Phantom* – the latter born out of the former, with whole sections re-ordered, rewritten, and replaced.

Like other classic works consumed in contemporary times, these plays — concerning a vampire stalking a familial estate — are interesting not just for what they reveal about the interests of 19th-century theatregoers and the social/artistic mores of the time, but in how they help illuminate how the now-standard tropes of vampirism took shape. It's interesting to note that Boucicault's villain displayed an impressive command of mesmerism and mind-control nearly a half-century before Bram Stoker imbued Dracula with similar traits. Meanwhile, other parts of the playwright's take on the creature — an ability to regenerate from death in the first light of the moon, for instance — weren't so enduring.

The plays retain their period language and ref-



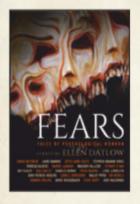
erences, but editors Matthew Knight and Gary D. Rhodes have wisely included an "Explanatory Notes" section at the back of the book to assist modern readers. For those who've wondered just how many writers have had a hand in creating vampire mythology as we know it today, this release fills in another piece of the puzzle.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

FEARS: TALES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HORROR

Ellen Datlow, ed.

Tachyon Publications



Star editor Ellen Datlow's new anthology portrays many of the worst things people are capable of doing to one another, if their psyches are so inclined. The human mind – what it compels and allows – is the source of horror in all 21 stories. The only monsters are us, and that absence of the weird, the supernatural, and the fantastical makes for especially disturbing reading. These tales are all the more unsettling because they feel possible.

Two are even fictional versions of real events. Steve Duffy's "White Noise in a White Room" examines military torture, and "Endless Summer" by Stewart O'Nan imagines serial killer Ted Bundy's chilling inner

monologue. A handful of other stories also concern serial killers of various stripes, none, thankfully, the stereotypical cop-teasing mastermind. Livia Llewellyn's "One of These Nights," with its vivid, hardened teenage girls, stands out among them.

Perhaps to jolt the jaded, Datlow includes several stories that hinge on the taboo subject of harming children. In Priya Sharma's gothic melodrama "My Mother's Ghosts," a haunting by a long-dead toddler resonates with Sam Shepard's Pulitzer-winning play *Buried Child*. Ray Cluley's "The Wrong Shark," set mostly during the production of *Jaws* on Martha's Vineyard, centres on vicious bullying. And the anthology's most poignant and haunting story, "Back Seat" by Bracken MacLeod, ponders parent-child relationships in light of heart-wrenching tragedy.

Noir-ish murder investigations, a paranoia-producing animal skin, nauseating class conflict, perhaps the slowest execution possible, and a heavy dollop of straight-up Nazi sadism are also in the mix. The selection's impressive list of authors includes Josh Malerman, Joyce Carol Oates, Stephen Graham Jones, Laird Barron, Dale Bailey, Annie Neugebauer, and more.

In her introduction, Datlow writes that she hopes her chosen stories "will instill a frisson of fear in the reader." By that criterion, *Fears* indelibly succeeds.

KARL RICHTER

LOST ESTATES

Cuan Diver Dress

Swan River Press

This collection is like a pleasant countryside walk through quiet woods, lonely hills, and a deserted beach in sunset, during which you're chilled to half-glimpse something out of the ordinary. "Quiet horror" is one way to describe these twelve stories; the publisher announces them as "antiquarian mysteries, book-collecting adventures, and otherworldly encounters," while their renowned British author prefers the terms "borderland" or "otherworld" stories.



IMMORTAL DARK

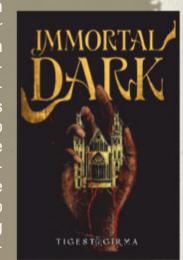
Tigest Girma

Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

If you lived through the young adult vampire boom of the mid-to-late aughts, you might have noticed that most of those books' main characters tended to be naive, often waifish, white girls. It's certainly something that irked Little, Brown Books Associate Editor Ruqayyah Daud and it's what made her so excited about *Immortal Dark*, a vampire story set at a decidedly unusual African university.

Kidan Adane loathes vampires (here known as dranaics), not just because her sister June was abducted by one but because she comes from one

of 80 ancient families sworn to feed the creatures. Her single-minded obsession with discovering what happened to June, her last surviving family member, leads her to accept admission to Uxlay University, a secretive institution that prepares humans and dranaics to live together in peace. As heir to one of the school's founding houses, Kidan has to contend with not just her fam-



ily's one remaining dranaic, who Kidan believes had a hand in her sister's disappearance, but the house itself, an entity capable of bringing those who reside in it considerable pain and misery until it can be mastered.

In Kidan, author Tigest Girma has created a complex and troubled character – she's a murderer from the opening chapter – who has the guts (and at times, sheer lunacy) necessary to stand up to and challenge a bloodsucker at his own vicious games. This adds a much welcome, heightened sense of danger to the various deadly deeds and machinations that take place on the Uxlay campus. In addition, Girma's dranaics are both scary and scary powerful, and she wraps them in a clever, unpredictable, ever-twisting plot that holds its secrets close until it's ready to unveil them, sometimes to devastating effect.

Apparently the opening salvo of a trilogy, *Immortal Dark* stakes its claim on young adult horror with intrigue, hot bursts of violence and betrayal, and no small body count. Watch out, it'll sink its fangs in you.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



ULL DISCLOSURE: I FIRST STEPPED FOOT IN THE STRANGE AND DEADLY DIMENSION KNOWN AS THE BLACK LANDS, WITH ITS SILVER-BLADED GRASS AND AGGRESSIVE SENTIENT TREES, fifteen years ago when the manuscript for *Temporary Monsters* landed on my desk at the humble little indie press I once operated.

"I wrote the first Black Lands story, *Temporary Monsters*, way back in 2007, and at the time I simply wanted to try my hand at the classic 'occult detective' story," author lan Rogers says of those early days. "I don't re-

call thinking it would go beyond that one story, but I had so much fun writing it, and reception to it was so strong when it was published as a chapbook by Burning Effigy Press, that it only made sense to write another one. The second story, *The Ash Angels*, was a continuation of certain themes in *Temporary Monsters*, but it's a quieter, more sombre tale, closer to a classic ghost story."

In the years since, Rogers released other Black Lands novellas and short stories, continuing to build the mythology of his alternate Earth — much like ours, except that a series of tears in reality began spreading across the planet in 1945, disappearing hapless humans and allowing far more violent things to slip in in their place.

In *Sycamore*, the first full-length Black Lands novel (out now from Cemetery Dance), Rogers' smartmouthed gumshoe takes what he believes to be a standard-issue detective gig as a break from the paranormal stuff. The idea for the book had been percolating in Rogers' brain for a long time, but before he could write it, he needed to overcome his stage fright.

"The world of the Black Lands was so big that I was worried about getting in over my head. I thought the idea for the story was strong, but my writing was weak, and I'd only end up ruining it," he confesses. "I didn't

want this to be just another case Felix was hired to investigate. At the same time, I also didn't want to write a big tent-pole novel with huge literary set pieces that would go against the vibe I'd been creating with the shorter Felix Renn stories. I wanted to dig deep into who Felix was and why he decided to make a living helping people with their paranormal problems. I also wanted to introduce a different type of antagonist beyond the rogue's gallery of monsters Felix had encountered in previous stories. The way I did that was by starting the book with Felix at a kind of crossroads in his

life. He's been working Black Lands cases for a few years at this point, and he knows if he keeps at it, one day he'll end up getting killed on the job."

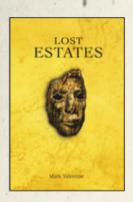
Indeed, the Sycamore case turns out to be anything but an innocuous missing persons investigation and, by the end of it, Renn has tangled with not just the Black Lands in a more direct and lasting way than ever before, but also with a powerful international crime family who sees nothing but endless opportunity in that strange land of perpetual night.

For those who'd like an immersive tour of Rogers' nightmare dimension without having to crack the spine of a book, Spotify will be releasing audio versions of *Sycamore* as well as the upcoming 2025 reprint of the Renn collection *SuperNOIRtural Tales*.

"My team [at Spotify] is fantastic and they've kindly involved me in the production process, which included auditioning narrators," he says. "I think they knew, as I did, that Felix's voice was extremely important, not just because he's the protagonist of *Sycamore*, but also the main character of the entire series, and we needed to find the right narrator to fit

the role. Fortunately, we found a very talented voice actor named Andrew Tell who not only sounds just like the version of Felix I hear in my head when I'm writing about him, but also did a great job of vocalizing the other characters, which is just as important."





These stories can only be possible in a country whose varied landscapes are imbued with millennia of history, but even more, a country seemingly filled with eccentric bachelors with too much time on their hands – which they devote to exploring strange customs (a place always ready at the table in an old country house for an unnamed king to play "A Chess Game at Michaelmas"), obscure publications (one, found in an empty antiquarian bookstore, in "Worse Things Than Serpents," may turn out to cost at least

an arm and a leg), legendary lost treasures (King John's jewels – or perhaps something way more sinister? – sucked by the seaside marshes in the densely atmospheric novella *The Fifth Moon*), and the like.

Horror and humour are perfectly blended when a lonesome clerk decides to spend his Christmas visiting an unknown person who keeps sending him weird holiday cards in "The Seventh Card." It's probably not "just the wind" when a medium and two special persons are invited to a solitary house to be "Readers of the Sands." And the titular story proves that there are scarier band reunions than Oasis: experimental musicians get together for a concert session which summons their long-lost member.

These are stories of immense subtlety, resonant with obscure history, folklore, and esotery, unpredictable and impeccable like a magician's trick which is great while you're in it, but it hits you even harder once you think it's over.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

SARAFINA Philip Fracassi

Earthling Publications

Right from *Sarafina*'s opening sentence, we're thrust into the corpse-borrowed boots of seventeen-year-old Ethan Belle. Cannonballs blast holes in the earth, bullets fly indiscriminately across the battlefield, and soldiers are blown apart, their entrails raining down on the terrified young soldier. Ethan can only run and pray the next death isn't his own as he searches for cover with Mason and Archie, his two older brothers in arms and in blood. Choosing possible survival over imminent death, the



brothers go AWOL and are pursued by bandits and the home guard across treacherous wilderness in the Deep South. Exhausted and starving – with one of them critically gut shot – they discover a cabin where a beautiful woman offers them sanctuary.

Unfortunately for the brothers, this is a Philip Fracassi story, and every shred of hope must be paid for in full. With Mason infatuated by their fair host as Archie tries not to die from his wound, Ethan can't help feeling this place is not as it seems. Between the fully stocked house, the surrounding river which flows in no direction, and the large dogs prowling the remote homestead, something is obscenely out of sorts.

The story snakes its roots deep into mythical territory of biblical proportions as our perspective constantly shifts with the unravelling of what Sarafina's home truly is and what it most certainly is not. Fracassi has zeroed in on the perfect balance of invoking pure dread while also fully immersing us in a lavish hellscape so captivating we can't help but turn the pages faster and faster despite fearing what's next. Angels may not always win, demons may not always weep, but we Fracassi freaks can expect to come out the other end reflective of the author's devastating and profound effect on our tattered souls.

As deceptively beautiful as the cover of *Sarafina* is, this is Fracassi at his best, which may well be the most terrifying aspect of all.

RICK HIPSON

LIBRARY THANKED

RESURRECTING HOLIDAY HORROR TRADITIONS

ver since I learned of the Victorian tradition of sharing ghost stories at Christmas, I've been itching to revive it, but why, I wonder, should we limit ourselves to spectres? So, for those who'd like to join me in adding a touch of horror to the holidays with the reading of spooky short fiction — either alone or with family and friends — may I turn your attention to three new themed anthologies for a perfect sinister antidote to all that saccharine seasonal cheer, no matter what your taste. Happy Holidays!

BEYOND & WITHIN: FOLK HORROR

Flame Tree Publishing

This folk horror anthology would look as fine under the tree as in someone's hands reading from it. With a shiny green and gold cover featuring an inset illustration of a skull, page edges that continue the cover's circular pattern in green and white, and its own yellow ribbon bookmark, it brings to mind the fancy tomes of yesteryear. And before anyone accuses me of judging a book by its (very pretty) cover, the anthology's list of contributors is equally solid, including John Connelly, Stephen Volk, V. Castro, Adam L.G. Nevill, and the step in some contributors is equally solid, including John Connelly, Stephen Volk, V. Castro, Adam L.G. Nevill, and the step in some contributors is equally solid, including John Connelly, Stephen Volk, V. Castro, Adam L.G. Nevill, and the step in some contributors is equally solid, including John Connelly, Stephen Volk, V. Castro, Adam L.G. Nevill, and the step in some contributors is equally solid.

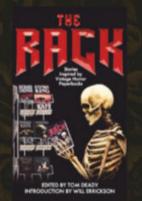


nelly, Stephen Volk, V. Castro, Adam L.G. Nevill, and a closing poem by award-winning horror poet Linda D. Addison.

THE RACK: STORIES INSPIRED BY VINTAGE HORROR PAPERBACKS

Greymore Publishing

Is your holiday crew heavy with Gen Xers? Do they have fond memories of the copious horrors once found on supermarket spinning racks? If so, *The Rack*'s twenty short stories may well deserve a place at your festivities — or perhaps stuffed in someone's stocking. Boasting a clever cover illustration by Lynne Hansen that gives several of the included tales their own mass-market cover

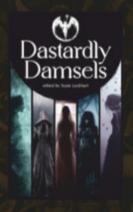


treatments, and contributions from Stephen King, Clay McLeod Chapman, Philip Fracassi, Gwendolyn Kiste, Rebecca Rowland, and others, there's no reason not to snatch this one off the rack.

DASTARDLY DAMSELS

Crystal Lake Publishing

Perhaps your dinner party guests are feminists with a taste for diverse plotlines and strong women. In that case, *Dastardly Damsels* could be the secret ingredient missing from the evening's menu. With a list of more than 30 contributors rounding out the all-women table of contents, editor Suzie Lockhart collects tales from heavy hitters such as Rachel Caine, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, and Nancy Holder as well as from plenty of emerging talents. These stories, which run the



gamut in subject matter from hauntings and vengeance to global disasters, offer just a small glimpse of the horrors ladies can unleash.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

Follow Monica on Substack at libraryofthedamned.substack.com

FRIGHT GALLERY CURATED BY PAIGE REYNOLDS



THIS MONTH: THE DARK AND DREAMY DRAWINGS OF SARAH KANE

A RUDNING COLLECTIBLE









Fine artist Sarah Kane creates highly detailed and haunting photo-real paintings and drawings. Her unique compositions — rendered in high-contrast greyscale and vivid colours — bridge the divide between dream and reality, inviting the viewer to escape into a dark and surreal world of horror pop culture.

NAME

Sarah Kane

HOMETOWN HAUNT

London, Ontario

WEAPON OF CHOICE

"I work primarily in acrylics for painting and graphite and conté for drawing. I have been dabbling more with gold leafing and ink."

DEEDS

"The art show I was most excited about was my Greek mythos show 'Something Wicked This Way Comes.' I rented both main exhibit spaces in London's The Arts Project, and filled the space with my work. I love mythological stories and fables from fairy tales, so it was a lot of fun to show my spin on everything."

MY NIGHTMARE FUEL

"My inspiration comes from absolutely everywhere. I love nature, especially in the evening; [also] through movies, TV shows, books and stories – in particular Grimm tales and Poe's works. There is always something that's catching for my own creations. This world has been rich with sweets for my creative tooth."

LAST WORDS

"Find that spark and let it catch fire. There is a lot of advice and criticism, some of it helpful, but the most important thing is how your art makes you feel."

RESTING PLACE

Find Sarah Kane on Instagram @kaneartstudios and at the Benz Gallery in London.

FOLLOW PAIGE ON INSTAGRAM @PAIGEREYNOLDSART



HROUGHOUT THE HISTORY
OF HORROR CINEMA, THE FORCES OF GOOD AND EVIL HAVE WAGED

bloody war against each other, a war that sometimes results in rivalries that see a hero and nemesis clashing time and time again: think Professor Van Helsing facing off against Dracula, Dr. Loomis pursuing Michael Myers, or yours truly taking on the fresh fennel from *Halloween: Resurrection* (regular readers know). The battle that will rage eternally, however, is that of the horror fan versus the remake.

These days, I try to live and let live when it comes to remakes because, well, one can only pop so many veins in a state of apoplexy before one comes to resemble a fool who has met the business end of the Lament Configuration, you know? I don't want to be found lying on a sidewalk somewhere, bleeding out of all my holes be-

cause I heard tell of a forthcoming remake of *The Witch* or what-

ever and I semi-exploded.

Quite frankly, it's just not
worth the gooey mess.
After all, the original
film will always exist
unharmed, there's a
chance the remake
will be fantastic, and at
the end of the day, the
Hollywood remake machine cannot be stopped.
No horror movie is too
sacred to be revisited
and really – should any of
them be?

This laissez-fear attitude of mine was hard won, let me tell you. After coming through the '80s and '90s rel-

atively unscathed, the naughty aughties proved a particularly trying time with regard to remakes. It suddenly seemed like every classic horror movie was being redone for a new generation, whether we wanted 'em or not. Rob Zombie took on *Halloween*. At one point, Michael Bay threatened us with his take on Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. And I think it's safe to say that we have collectively decided to forget that the 2005 version of *The Fog* ever happened. It is silly to admit, but these announcements often felt like a personal affront, a "how very dare they?" on par with farting during a funeral service. That sort of pearl-clutching offends me more than the movies in question, and so I've tried to swallow my pride and see if I can't find something to enjoy in all of those remakes I once heartily disparaged, something I was too blinded-by-rage to see once upon a time. But holy shit, some of these movies make it hard for me to forgive and forget!

Case in point, 2006's *Black Xmas* (pronounced, I assume, as "Black Extreme-mas"). I consider the 1974 original to be an unassailable masterpiece, but there is always room in the place where my heart should be for more holiday horror-nanigans, so I keep trying to give *Black Xmas* a chance. "Oh, it's got a great cast," I tell myself. "Look, they brought back Andrea Martin!" Things seem to be going well between me and *Black Xmas* until it busts out that one detail that is forever wrapped in a plastic bag and seated in a rocking chair in the attic of my mind: that they made the film's killer, Billy, suffer from a "rare liver disease" that renders his skin a bright yellow.

In 1974, Billy the killer was an unknown, nothing more than an eye behind a door and a maniacal voice on the telephone. Decades later, they flesh out this blank slate's backstory with... *jaundice*? Man, what kind of creative bankruptcy was happening in the aughties for a slasher killer's motivations to boil down to "liver disease" or, in the case of Leatherface, "skin disease" (as I railed against in *RM#206*)? In The Good Old Days we had killers who were just plain evil, or sought revenge for the death of a loved one, or were victims of cruel pranks... but in the remakes, these very same villains are given vague, random "diseases" and we are to be frightened and dazzled?

Ah, see, there I go, about to pop a vein again. It's not worth it! It's not worth raging out over 2006 Billy's liver disease when I have yet to see what the 2019 *Black Christmas* has in store for me. Remember kids, to avoid bleeding out of all of your holes, keep repeating, "It's only a remake...it's only a remake..."

HORROR CULTURE









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ROCK

DOA DEAD ON

PUNK

REVIEWS BY JESSICA BUCK, ALEX DELLER, JILLIAN DRACHMAN,



THE BREEDLING

ELECTRONIC

Detritus

Wrong Speed Records

When folk horror and music collide, you can generally find folksiness, witchy rock, shaggy stoner riffing, or - perhaps, on a good day - a surprising mix of the three. The second album from The Breedling (a.k.a. visual artist Chris Spalton) neatly upends such tired expectations with strange electronic landscapes striking a resonant vein of bladder-chilling unease. This gift for disquieting conjurations is perhaps unsurprising, given Spalton's fascination with local folklore - an interest that has extended to his writing and illustrating a book on the subject, 2011's Apparitions of East Anglia. As it looms, glowers, and groans, Detritus recalls the likes of The Bug, Reigns, and even Deadly Avenger minus the playful kitsch. Things glurp and boom and threaten, with industrialized overtones that suggest the mills and factories have greedily consumed merry olde England's green and pleasant lands. The underlying message, however, is that somehow the old ways will always endure, and they will never entirely be stilled. \square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\s



PØLTERGEIST

Nachtmusik

BAD OMEN RECORDS

With a heart blacker than the tarry oil sands of its native Alberta, Pølter-

GOTH

geist manifests a deliciously dark mix of goth, post-punk, and straight-up rawk. Nachtmusik winds, weaves, and lunges with slightly louche vigour, everything permeated with a wooziness that's equal parts incense, cracked leather, and the sour tang of cheap aftershave at a crowded rock club. Frontman Kalen Baker boasts both an engaging baritone and a headful of Michael Moorcock and Edgar Allan Poe, and as the album spools out, he demonstrates a canny knack for corralling both into smart, catchy, '80s-leaning nuggets that should appeal whether your tastes tend towards The Cult, The Killers, or Wipers. While there's admittedly a fair amount of similar stuff on offer these days, Pøltergeist is already shouldering itself to the front of the line with an impressive album that, like its movie namesake, proudly proclaims, it's heeeeerrre! \sum_\sum_\sum_\sum_1/2 AD



BLACK VEIL BRIDES

ROCK

Bleeders

SPINEFARM RECORDS

Vocalist Andy Biersack of Black Veil Brides cites his dad's copy of the Sweeney Todd soundtrack as the gateway to his love of dark music, and ultimately the creation of the band. Now, he channels the Demon Barber himself on Black Veil Brides' newest EP, Bleeders. Of the three songs, only the title track is original material; a glossy metalcore romp that sounds like every edgy movie trailer from 2004. Keeping on theme, it also takes a stab at U2's "Sunday Bloody Sunday" but doesn't deconstruct or add enough to make it noteworthy. Circling back to Sweeney Todd, the album ends with a passionate rendition of "My Friends," which showcases Biersack's solid vocal range. Blood being the album's throughline, the band is encouraging fans to donate theirs to

the American Red Cross - and has already amassed over 2200 pledges. This might not be a life-changing album musically, but in other ways, it could be. 🕺 💆 JB



TRAILER PARK VAMPIRE

A Blessing and a Curse

(INDEPENDENT)

Rickey Rea, a.k.a. Trailer Park Vampire, is a one-man rock 'n' roll machine from Memphis. His character is based on local horror host Savid (Watson Davis) who helmed the Fantastic Features show during the late '60s and later, well, occupied a trailer park. While the in-costume resemblance between the two is actually uncanny, Trailer Park Vampire's music bears similarities to a number of '70s rock icons but mostly Kiss (the album artwork is kind of a giveaway). Think big, mid-paced anthems and arena-rock vocals, sometimes based on matters of the heart but with dark-

er vibes on tracks such as "Inside the Living Dead" and "Autopsy." TPV only releases his music on CD so don't go looking on any streaming services for your rock 'n' roll fix, but you might want to search "Rocking Vampire" on YouTube for maximum theatricality (and boobs). \$\\mathbb{2}\\\mathbb{1}\)2 AVL



GO-GO KILLERS

Beelzebubble Bath

PIGME RECORDS

From the deep dark southern state of Alabama, where the moon is bright and the werewolves howl, comes Go-Go Killers with a two-volume dosage of wreck 'n' roll on Beelzebubble Bath. For the uninitiated, Go-Go Killers mine The Cramps' swamp rock sound as well as a penchant for B-humour, B-horror imagery, and perhaps most importantly, a dirty mind loaded with double entendres, best represented with tracks "The Return of the Thing with Two Heads" and "Poke

400 LONELY THINGS The New Twilight

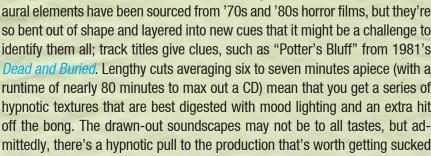
COLD SPRING RECORDS

400 Lonely Things (a.k.a. Craig Varian, who previously remixed the library tracks for Night of the Living Dead) is back with a new collection of ambient, meditative mood music marking his 17th(!) album. The neat trick here is that the key



aural elements have been sourced from '70s and '80s horror films, but they're runtime of nearly 80 minutes to max out a CD) mean that you get a series of hypnotic textures that are best digested with mood lighting and an extra hit off the bong. The drawn-out soundscapes may not be to all tastes, but admittedly, there's a hypnotic pull to the production that's worth getting sucked into. 🖁 🖁 🗒 JS

EXPERIMENTAL





NIGHTFALL

THEME: Horror/Supernatural FORMAT: Audio Drama FREQUENCY: Mass release

The 1980s weren't just a big decade for horror movies; radio got in on the spooky action too. Before podcasts, radio dramas were the norm, with full theatrical productions brought to the ears of listeners



through standard FM and AM channels. From 1980 to 1983, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation – typically known for its polite cultural programming – ran a 100-episode horror series called *Nightfall*. While considered one of the CBC's highest-rated shows in its long history, the scares were apparently so convincing that it was pulled from several affiliate stations due to listener complaints.

Created by producer Bill Howell, who helmed the show in Toronto from 1980 to '82 before Don Kowalchuk took over in Vancouver from 1982 to '83, the show benefitted from the use of CBC studios across the country and their respective production crews. Hosted by the mysterious Luther Kranst and later Frederick Hende, each 30-minute episode is a dramatization of a spooky tale — sometimes classic short stories such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" or "The Monkey's Paw," but also original tales about ghosts, vampires, the uncanny, cursed objects, and the cruelty of humanity. Primarily in the realm of horror and the supernatural, some episodes also veer into sci-fi, mystery, and fantasy themes.

No, *Nightfall* isn't necessarily focused on telling maple syrup-drenched Canuck stories, but it doesn't shy away from mining its native territory for tales. "Cemetery Stop" follows a TTC (Toronto Transit Commission) bus driver along his route as he picks up mysterious passengers, while "Last Visit" is a gut punch of a journey through the Newfoundland fog. Despite the distinct locales, the stories retain universal appeal.

Due to the age of these analog files, audio quality tends to vary across episodes. Luckily, passionate fans of the series have been tracking down original tapes to digitize and clean them up for the rest of us to enjoy. The quality of performances, however, is topnotch throughout the entire library. While many audio dramas fall victim to cheesy acting and one-dimensional sound, *Nightfall* employed professional writers, actors, and sound designers to create worlds that outshine many modern productions, much in the same way that practical movie effects outlive CGI.

Podcast fans who have sampled just about every show out there will delight in discovering this buried treasure; find it on the usual apps and sample the maple syrup horror nostalgia!

JESSICA BUCK

the Cat." The songs all follow a similarly steady, headbanging brand of rhythm 'n' blues, boasting fuzzed-out guitars and plenty of shout-out chorus anthems. Repetitive sounding songs and lack of speed make this album a little less entertaining than previous efforts, though fans of dirty, grinding, meandering guitar may disagree \$\times\tilde{\mathbb{S}} \times AVL



METAL

BEWITCHER Spell Shock

CENTURY MEDIA RECORDS

Portland's Bewitcher aims to deliver speed-infused "Black Magick Metal" on Spell Shock, with a heavy dose of '80s worship and a brew of various styles: rock, classic heavy metal, thrash, black metal, and more. The album's slick yet sufficiently harsh sound lends it a modern polish, largely thanks to the efforts of producer Lars Frederiksen, a fixture of punk institution Rancid. Spell Shock's rebellious and fist-pumping numbers are well-suited for live settings; from biker territory to Satanism, Bewitcher covers a lot of ground here, although sometimes too superficially. While Spell Shock will likely prove a feel-good pick for aggression addicts seeking sonic accompaniment to a few rounds of ale, this clichéd offering ultimately lacks originality, depth, and meaning. Overall, it amounts to a very competent homage to the band's idols, but it gives little reason to put down the classics. 🕺 💆 JD



DEAD FLESH STIGMA

Necrocosmic Death Ritual

Werewolf Records

The artist known as V-KhaoZ dis-

METAL

plays his full eccentric brilliance on Dead Flesh Stigma's debut, an ode to misanthropy called Necrocosmic Death Ritual. Dangerous yet trollishly playful, this reinvigorating scorcher represents psychedelic industrial black metal at its wildest, and is as haunting as northern lights presiding over epic carnage. Seamlessly wedding bestial brutality with masterful experimental impulses, V-KhaoZ sprinkles his inhospitable soundscapes with elements of the symphonic, ambient, and electronic. The compositions, including their otherworldly interludes, serve as portals to surprise-filled dimensions, giving way to the orgasmic bliss of the truly bizarre. Inhuman beats pound like ammo, flies descend, death rattles agonize, and the dancing plague strikes. Pencil in Necrocosmic Death Ritual as one of the top black metal titles of 2024. **\$**\$\$\$1/2 JD



METAL

WITCHCRAFT

Eternal Sea

EDGED CIRCLE PRODUCTIONS

A product of Croatia, Witchcraft's devilishly charming 1989 metallic triumph Eternal Sea finally receives a proper physical release from Edged Circle Productions, allowing audiences to fully apprehend its merits. From the very intro, it's apparent why this delightfully quirky album, originally printed as a demo in 1989, allegedly influenced both Sepultura and King Diamond. This new release features three extra tracks, including "Odyssey," a welcome rendition of "Sunrise" from Richard Strauss' Also sprach Zarathustra as a nod to Stanley Kubrick's 2001. Truly, Eternal Sea feels as though it was recorded in an arachnophile's musty cellar during a clandestine ritual. Despite its sweet blasphemy, there persists the strange and refreshing virgin innocence of the work of truly inspired innovators. Grab an amiable "Sinful Nun," and drown in this pool of un-



cret? As a horror fan, I think I might be a bit over it. I know, It's our holiday and our time of year – but after years and years of Halloween parties, memorable costumes, all-night splatter movie-thons, and maybe even a naughty night or two in a graveyard, I don't think there's anything left to experience on All Hallows' Eve. So here's an idea: instead of revelling in an already spooky season, let's concentrate on bringing the horror vibe to other holidays for year-round debauchery. With that in mind, here are a few tracks from Aaron Von Lupton's own Holiday Horror playlist to provide a frightfully festive backdrop to whatever the hell you and your loved ones get up to this season.



MIDNIGHT SYNDICATE | "DANCE OF THE SUGAR PLUM FAIRY"

Back in *RM#162*, we featured horror instrumental act Midnight Syndicate and its *Christmas: A Ghostly Gathering* album where a collection of carols and holiday classics is played relatively straight, but still in the artist's signature

dark and gothic style. Any track from this album is a worthy addition to your playlist but I especially recommend this haunting rendition of Tchaikovsky's classic "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy," which was even used in an episode of Grant Morrison's Christmas-themed television series *Happy!* (if you're into that kind of thing).



DOUGLAS PIPES | "KRAMPUS KAROL OF THE BELLS"

You might recognize composer Douglas Pipes' "Krampus Karol of the Bells" from Michael Dougherty's horror comedy *Krampus*, where it plays over the last few minutes of the end credits. Intended to tie in to the titular monster's

Eastern European roots, the track is a reworking of the Ukrainian classic "Carol of the Bells" but with an added choir, warning whoever is left in the audience that Krampus just might be coming to your town this and every Christmas.

TIGER ARMY I "OOGIE BOOGIE'S SONG"

The 2006 reissue of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* soundtrack featured five cover songs from acts including Fall Out Boy, Fiona Apple, and Marilyn



Manson, which set the stage for a deadly tribute album for the film's fifteenth anniversary two years later called *Nightmare Revisited*. There are a lot of bangers on that one, but here's a deep cut: California psychobilly legend Tiger Army contributed a rendition of "Oogie Boogie's

Song" that was available as a digital bonus track not featured on the CD!



MYUU | "WINTER TROUBLE"

Myuu, a.k.a. Nicolas Gasparini, is a horror composer who makes his dark compositions available for free with a Creative Commons license on his website. While his film and TV credits are sparse, he did contribute the dark piano ver-

sion of "Jingle Bells" for the 2019 *Child's Play* remake. For whatever reason, Myuu has a clear affinity for creepy Christmas compositions: check out his takes on "Carol of the Bells," the very Carpenter-esque "Cold Shivers," and the festive but doomy "Winter Trouble."



RASPUTINA | "GINGERBREAD COFFIN"

American cello-rock band Rasputina has a long history of writing songs around dark moments in history, including the Donner Party tragedy, outbreaks of yellow fever, and the Pope's decision to allow Catholics to eat the

semi-aquatic giant rodent capybara in the 16th century during Lent (yuck!). "Gingerbread Coffin" is the lead track of the 2002 album *Cabin Fever*, and describes children engaging in a black mass set to Edward Gorey imagery. The perfect soundscape for a truly black Christmas.



CHRISTOPHER LEE | "JINGLE HELL"

Hammer legend Christopher Lee may be long gone but we're still trying to get over the fact that he spent his last few years on Earth releasing heavy metal Christmas music. With the tongue-in-cheek "Jingle Hell," Lee became

the oldest living person to enter the charts when it landed on the Hot 100 at number 22, eventually hitting eighteen. With seemingly nothing he couldn't do, Sir Christopher Lee continues to be the reigning king of horror.

NOW PLAYING > FEAR THE SPOTLIGHT, HOLLOWBODY

EAR THE SPOTLIGHT

Cozy Game Pals/Blumhouse

PC, Nintendo Switch, PS4/5, XboxOne/S

Steam lists Fear the Spotlight as a "survival game," but that's a bit misleading, given that survival horror titles are usually built on high stakes and jump scares that are as likely to provide cardiac arrest as they are amusement. For those who prefer their spookiness high on vibes and low on stress, Blumhouse and Cozy Game Pals invite you to a narrative descent into darkness they aptly describe as "a love letter to classic '90s horror experiences."

Bookworm Vivian is crushing on her goth BFF Amy, and so she agrees to participate in a seance with her in their school library after hours. Surprising them both, the seance works – Amy disappears and Vivian is plunged into the mystery of a school fire that claimed the lives of 40 students several years before. Gathering clues through notes left by students and faculty, Vivian must solve simple puzzles to reveal the truth of a school play production gone horribly wrong, all while avoiding the blinding gaze of the monstrous spotlight creature that lurks in the hall-

Returning to that whole cozy horror gaming thing, Fear the Spotlight is more concerned with raising the hairs on your arms than your heart rate – exposure to Mr. Spotlight's beam will trigger Vivian's asthma, easily cured with the inhalers found readily throughout the school campus. Interactive items are indicated with a twinkle, environments are easy to navigate, and the stories (both Vivian's and the whole fire disaster thing) are solid and engaging.

A highly anticipated title since it was pulled from Steam last year and acquired by Blumhouse for an overhaul, it's a pleasant surprise for those of us who worried that the studio's gaming output might be little more than interactive marketing for its films (not that I wouldn't play



the shit out of a Black Phone game, mind you). More chills than cheap thrills, it'll get your heart pumping for all the right reasons.

ANDREA SUBISSATI



S: COZY, IF YOU LIKE THAT SORT OF THING COZY, IF YOU DON'T LIKE THAT SORT OF THING



HOLLOWBODY

Headware Games

Indie video games inspired by the survival horror classics of the early aughts have been

popular for some time now. Hollowbody - the latest addition to this wild and varied brood takes the mechanics and visual style of those retro titles and plunks them into an eerie dystopian future.

Set in England some six decades after a devastating bioterrorism attack, players fill the shoes of Mica, whose hovercraft crashes during a storm while she's on a rescue mission into the exclusion zone. Now stranded in the deserted city herself, she must find a way to survive and escape. The story of what happened in that cursed place unravels via uncovered evidence, recordings of past events relayed through the

C.O.T.A.C. radio, and mysterious otherworldly conversations, all while a grisly assortment of "strays" attempt to sink their hungry teeth into Mica.

Like the era of games it lovingly mimics, the camera angles are often fixed; there's no ability to jump or climb so while it looks open world, it's full of both visible and invisible barriers; and managing quick turns can be awkward and challenging (despite there being a button for that). Yet, the dull washed-out colour palette, ruin-porn urban landscape, and strange organic growths of the exclusion zone do a fine job of establishing the dour post-apocalyptic setting long before the monsters show up. That said, combat is clunky with limited attack variety, and there's no good reason that it takes as many bullets as it does to down the game's zombie-esque creatures, but for a one-man effort, one can't deny that *Hollowbody* is pretty impressive.



Unlike most PC games, the developer specifically recommends tackling this one with a controller. So, if you have one handy, along with an extra twenty bones in your pocket and a love of imperfect retro-style survival horror, there's a strange new hellscape awaiting you in Hollowbody.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



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STACIE PONDER

"It's here in the third installment that [Freddy] truly becomes the bona fide pop culture icon he remains today.'



ADAM CLARKE

"When it comes to unforgettable images, Dream Master delivers."

F YOU ASK ME, RUE MORGUE COULD DEDICATE AN ENTIRE ISSUE TO THE FACT THAT A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 3: DREAM WARRIORS IS THE BEST SEQUEL in the franchise. This is due in no small part to the scene where OG Elm Street final girl Nancy Thompson, now in her very early twenties, shows up at a funeral dressed like a 50-something nighttime-drama business maven of the '80s who's having an affair with her rival's college-aged son.

But Dream Warriors is so much more than Nancy's amazing fashion sense. It's also the groundbreaking approach to continuing Nancy's story: having survived the deaths of her friends at the blade-tipped hand of Freddy Krueger, she doesn't simply vanish from time as Final Girls tend to do. She has a life, using her trauma as fuel to help troubled youth in her budding career as a therapist. Bringing her back as an advisor of sorts to a new generation of would-be victims was a baller move by filmmakers and served to solidify Nancy's status as a horror hall-of-famer.

It was also a baller move to give Dream Warriors a roster of would-be victims that we actually care about it's a rare instance in slasherdom when audiences find themselves rooting for the survivors instead of the charismatic killer. These (ahem) dream warriors, each unique and distinct, will not only charm you into submission -

they strike a chord with every one of us who has ever felt like a misfit, a weirdo or an outsider, or just plain misunderstood.

Their shine, however, doesn't dim Freddy's light at all. It's here in the third installment that he truly becomes the bona fide pop culture icon he remains today. He maintains the perfect balance between the scary menace he displayed in the 1984 original and the wisecracking clown he would become in later films. He will rip out your tendons and manipulate you like a puppet, or he'll do something dumb like turn into a television set and taunt you with a sassy line.

See how we need a full issue to talk about this movie? I haven't even gotten to the Harryhausen-esque stop-motion skeleton or the bangin' hair metal theme song yet. Which is the best *Elm Street* sequel – how is this even a question?

HE ORIGINAL A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET REFLECTS HOW CREATOR WES CRAVEN SAW HORROR AND VIOLENCE AS THINGS HIS CHARACTERS COULD overcome: trauma and cruelty would not define his protagonists. These themes were expanded on in the two Elm Street sequels he (co-)wrote, Dream Warriors and New Nightmare. Neither of those is the best sequel, however. Renny Harlin's *The Dream Master* is the only reasonable choice,

> like selecting the pizza slice with the most screaming meatballs on it.

After three movies, one could argue that Freddy Krueger had lost some of his edge, going from a sadistic ghoul avenging himself in dreams to crashing real-world pool parties in Freddy's Revenge. Dream Warriors tried to spice things up by giving him an unnecessary backstory as "the bastard son of a hundred maniacs." Dream Master cranks up the menace as well as the suspense: lest we forget, Freddy slaughters the dream warriors within minutes in spite of their cheesy superpowers. A Nightmare sequel is only as strong as its protagonist, and when Nightmare 4 heroine Alice faces off against the fedora-sporting ghoul, he cooly replies "I am eternal" - to which she



doesn't even flinch!

17%

Alice also embodies the lineage of slaughtered Elm Street kids that came before her in a more meaningful way than Nancy ever did. Harnessing the power of her fallen friends is an intrinsic part of her character, giving her the power she needs to become the titular Dream Master.

Most crucially, which film has Freddy eating the iconic large pizza where the meatballs have the screaming faces of his victims? When it comes to unforgettable images, *Dream Master* delivers. It might not be as deep or thoughtful as the entries Craven worked on, but the best sequel should be the one that's the most fun while staying true to what came before: Master deserves that accolade.

WHAT HORROR MOVIE FEATURES THE BEST HALLOWEEN PARTY EVER?

ROM 62

83%

NIGHT OF THE DEMONS FEATURES THE BEST HALLOWEEN PARTY EVER!

ROB ZOMBIE'S HALLOWEEN II

ForteanTimes

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